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Kalātattvakośa

A LEXICON
OF FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS
OF THE INDIAN ARTS

VOL. III
PRIMAL ELEMENTS – MAHĀBHŪTA

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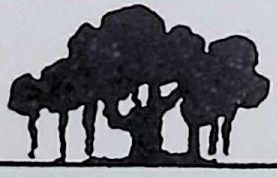
KALĀTATTVAKOŚA

A LEXICON OF FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF THE INDIAN ARTS

General Editor
Kapila Vatsyayan



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KALĀTATTVAKOŚA VOL.- III

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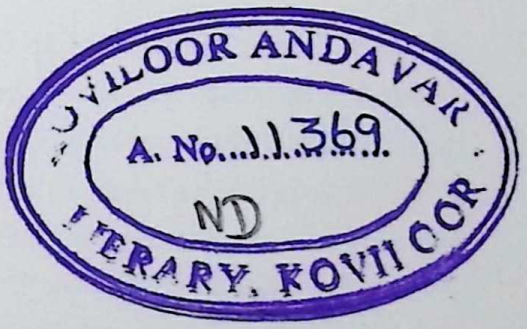
PRIMAL ELEMENTS - *MAHĀBHŪTA*

KALĀTATTVAKOŚA
VOLUME III

Editor
Bettina Bäumer



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GENERAL EDITOR'S NOTE

It is after an inescapable gap of four years that Volume III of the *Kalātattvakośa* is being published. The intervening years preoccupied the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts with the theme of the Primal Elements (*Mahābhūtas*) on many levels and in many dimensions. The discourse was carried through as in the case of Space(*Ākāśa*) and Time(*Kāla*), through the fundamental sciences - principally astrophysics, astronomy and microbiology; the philosophic schools of Brahmanical, Jaina, Buddhist, Islamic, Christian and Judaic thought; civilizations – Greek, Chinese, Meso-American and Indian; the wisdom traditions of the indigenous groups – the Santhals, the Apatanis, the Todas, the Australian aborigines, the Brazilian and the African. Through a series of five Seminars*, each interlocked, the fundamental concerns of humanity at the most sophisticated level of abstraction and the permeating level of life-function and life-meaning was shared. The dialogical and the relational were the tools of perception and insight into the four or five primal elements which have enveloped the universe and are crucial for the survival of humanity.

The IGNCA has endeavoured to perceive, see and look at the universals through the telescope and the microscope; hear and listen through the textual and oral; smell through the inbreath and outbreath of the living traditions; taste through the experience of the creative artist; and feel and move through the still symbols and imageries of frozen stone and the dynamic image of kinetic movement. All this was attempted through the multi-media presentation on *Prakṛti* (Harmony with Nature), the performances of the Langas, the paintings of Santokbha, the story of the clay pot in the hands of the potter.

---

* The outcome of the five successive but interlocked Seminars is a 5 volume collection, of which the 1st volume focuses on the *Oral tradition*, the 2nd on *Vedic, Buddhist and Jaina traditions*, the 3rd on the *Agamic tradition and the Arts*, the 4th volume is titled : *The Nature of Matter* and the 5th : *Man in Nature*. The collection titled : *Prakṛti : The Integral Vision* is published by the IGNCA and DK Printworld, New Delhi, 1995.

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The *Kalātattvakośa* Volume III is integral to this larger and extensive enterprise of an inter-disciplinary and cross-cultural dialogue around unifying themes of perennial value. Here our microscope is through the lens of textual traditions restricted largely to the Sanskrit, Pāli and Prākrit sources. An indepth investigation into primary sources of these traditions is an essential prerequisite for any meaningful comparative work.

The terms included in the *Kalātatttvakośa* Volume III and Volume IV (to follow soon) all revolve the concept of the *Mahābhūtas* in all streams of Indian thought on Vedic, Pauranic, Buddhist and Jaina, in disciplines ranging from Āyurveda to metaphysics, astronomy, philosophy, politics and the arts. Even a cursory perusal of the contents of this Volume, as also of the preceding two *Kalātattvakośa* Volumes I and II make it amply clear that each concept was explored at its most physical and material and metaphysical and spiritual levels. The method of exploration was both embodiment and disembodiment of the concept. The triad of the *adhyātmika* (spiritual), *ādhidaivika* (divine) and *ādhibhautika* (physical) was near universal, as was the movement from the subtle to the gross (*sūkṣma* to *sthūla*) and the multi-dimensionality and multi-directionality of space and time. Multi-layering and a systems approach of establishing correspondence was a natural and necessary concomitant. This will be evident in the articles of each of the three Volumes. Only a superficial reader will see these as either overlaps or repetitions. The inter-penetration of levels of meaning within a concept and between concepts has the fineness of a sharp needle and the fluidity of a drop of water or oil or an absorbent surface. These articles have attempted the difficult task of identifying the process of threading the needle and the expansion of the point, the drop the *bindu*, and thus the essence of the concept in many if not all domains. Materiality and non-materiality of the over-arching concept of *Prakṛti* begins the Volume. The primal elements from the subtlest (*ākāśa*) to the apparently grossest (*pṛthivī*) are investigated, each with its integrity and its interpenetration into the others. Mutuality of pairs emerges, and as that of water and fire, water and earth, fire, wind, etc., to develop into a mighty system of ecological balance based on interdependence of matter and non-matter; man-nature; physical and psychical; active and passive; the outer and inner; the senses, mind, intellect and consciousness at micro and macro levels. The terms included in Volume IV, viz. *indriya, dravya, dhātu, guṇa, adhibhūta/adhidaiva/adhyātma, sthūla/sūkṣma, sṛṣṭi/sthiti/pralaya* will hopefully unfold the system even more clearly.

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The structure, method and treatment have been again outlined by the Editor – Dr. Bettina Bäumer who has competently and painstakingly completed this work. I thank her and especially so as this will be the last of the three volumes under her editrorship.

I take this opportunity once again to pay my sincerest tribute to Tarkatīrtha Laksman Shastri Joshi a visionary giant of this century, who made it possible for us to have courage to embark upon the arduous path of identifying two hundred fifty terms (trees) of the great and verderous forest of concepts of the Indian tradition.

Kapila Vatsyayan

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INTRODUCTION

sarvaṃ sarvātmakam
Everything is related to the whole.

I. General Background

The Indian Arts are like the branches of a vast tree of culture, thought, science, ritual and spirituality, and they cannot be understood in isolation. They are based on fundamental Indian conceptions of the cosmos and of man, of space and time, of the body, mind and self. These have crystallized in the Sanskrit tradition as specific concepts which pervade virtually all disciplines. Theories of aesthetics rest on philosophical concepts but are also deeply linked with medical thought and with mystical experience. The wide range of Indian art forms are interrelated through shared aesthetic theories, and there are also basic principles of form manifested in the various media employed, so that the Arts themselves are interdependent in much the same way that interrelationships exist between the sciences, religions and philosophies. The Arts form an integral part of the total culture.

So far, the Indian Arts have been largely studied in isolation, with much emphasis being given to chronologies and stylistic analysis along Western lines. The questions of meaning and the interdependence between the Arts and other disciplines have received relatively less attention. Literary and art-historical studies have rarely been combined, so as to do justice to both. There is a vast literature containing theoretical texts on the Indian Arts (Śilpa-Śāstra, Vāstu-Śāstra, Saṅgīta-Śāstra) which has not yet been sufficiently investigated and applied to the interpretation of the Arts themselves. The self-interpretation of the tradition in which the Arts have developed has yet to be carried out, partly because an adequate method of understanding the texts has been lacking.

In the context of a Seminar on "Shastric Traditions in Indian Arts" [1] T.S. Maxwell has thrown light on the interrelationship of Śāstra and Prayoga, of theoretical literature and practical application. Against the view that the Śāstras are dry classifications which are often contradicted by artistic practice, he asserts: "Those texts epitomised and consolidated the culture in which the artist lived and worked, and from which he drew his inspiration; Śilpaśāstra, as the body of texts which effectively legitimised his calling within the culture, has

[1] A. L. Dallapiccola (Ed.): Shastric Traditions in Indian Arts, Stuttgart: Steiner 1989.

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endeavoured to preserve parts of this vision... All art-forms are practical and symbolic expressions of cultural intelligence; they carry a passive burden of assumed or inherited knowledge and an active burden of conscious knowledge which is intentionally communicated. Once one becomes aware of these two interpenetrating levels, the chaotic background of archetypes and the ordered foreground of didacticism, the methods and skills of the artist are defined, just as they are defined by shastric precept: the master *śilpin* must have (without claiming another's province for his own) knowledge of all the arts, from metrics and poetic imagery to music and dance, painting and sculpture, in increasing detail, his own field being placed last in the list, emphasising its juniority but also the legitimacy of its traditional descent; and he must be able to mobilise this knowledge in connexion with yoga and meditational techniques in order to visualise fully, from brief descriptions, the forms he will create. As an actor in and an agent of his society, he must be open to the cultural sources of that society." (pp. 11-12). Thus the texts present various kinds of sources for the artist, and to interpret art without them means to reduce our understanding of the total context in which art has its meaning.

The **Kalātattvakośa** project aims to bridge an important gap in the understanding of Indian culture by selecting 250 fundamental concepts (based on Sanskrit) from the various disciplines, schools and texts and focussing on their occurrence and their significance in the Arts. Presented in the form of a lexicon, **Kalātattvakośa** gives each concept in its various contexts and provides the textual sources, both in the original and in translation. It is a research tool for scholars and all who are interested in penetrating to the meaning contained in artistic creativity, expression, form and purpose.

The criteria of selection are based on the frequency of interdisciplinary occurrence and the wide-ranging importance of the terms. Only concepts having meaning in a range of disciplines and associated literatures have been selected: *rasa*, for example, is used in the Vedas, and in medical (Āyurvedic) and chemical (Rasaśāstric) contexts, as well as in aesthetics. Purely technical terms within a particular tradition have thus been omitted; these will be treated in separate Technical Glossaries (for example on Saṅgīta-Śāstra and Śilpa-Śāstra). The lexicon concentrates on terms of fundamental and widespread significance in the primary sources, and thus avoids both tacit interpretation by partiality of selection, and the ongoing interpretive controversies of the secondary literature.

The criteria governing the selection of primary sources are two: the texts must be considered representative of a discipline or school of thought, and they must be the oldest available sources of that school complete with commentaries. The texts quoted do not pretend to be exhaustive, but aim to represent the most

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important literatures and disciplines. Thus in addition to the Vedas, Vedāṅgas, Smṛti, Itihāsa, Purāṇas, Darśanas, Tantras and Āgamas, the **Nāṭya-Śāstra** along with Abhinavagupta's commentary, for example, plays a central role in establishing links between concept and art, drama (*nāṭya*) being the origin of the different Arts and of aesthetic theory.

The limitation to Sanskrit sources and related material (Prakrit, Pali), including cognates (Greek, Latin), results from the nature of the undertaking. It is the intention to cover the entire Indian tradition, and **Kalātattvakośa** is the Sanskritic section of the project. The editors are fully aware that the Arabic-Persian sources require an equal treatment of their basic aesthetic, philosophical and artistic concepts, and that the Sanskrit sources must be complemented by their counterparts in the Dravidian languages. Indeed, to present as complete a picture as possible of the development of a concept in the Indian tradition, it should be traced through the Middle Indian to modern Indian literatures, with indication of the more important semantic developments. This is not feasible at the present stage, and restraint has had to be exercised within the articles presented here.

The entries cannot therefore pretend to be exhaustive. The tradition is so rich, and the source material so varied, that it is not possible to present a complete historical picture of each and every concept with all its variations; and as the focus is on the Arts, philosophical discussion has had to be limited to a minimum to prevent overbalance. Within these limitations, the absence of a preconceived interpretive scheme should enable the reader from any discipline to identify interconnections between basic concepts from the original texts in pursuit of his own specific interest, and to spread his research beyond the immediate confines of the lexicon.

II. Method and Use

1. The lexicon is *not organised alphabetically* but thematically by concepts. Groups of related terms are assembled in each volume, and the logic of their arrangement is explained in the introduction. Alphabetical reference is facilitated by the **List of Terms** which gives the complete list of entries for the whole lexicon, mentioning the volume in which an article has already appeared. The **Index** directs the reader to the occurrence of the terms throughout, and also refers him to other significant terms in Sanskrit and English. Arrows → refer to an entry, in the same or another volume, where the term in question is treated more extensively.

2. Within a desirable flexibility of *structure*, the content of an entry generally follows this sequence:

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Overview

Etymology and related/cognate terms

Layers of meaning

Development of the concept

Manifestation in the Arts

Classification

Process

Conclusion

Quick identification of a section which may interest the reader specifically is thus facilitated.

In some cases where a concept has a distinct meaning in different fields, an article has been divided into two or three parts assigned to different authors.

3. All *Sanskrit quotations* are given in *devanāgarī* with a full English translation; Sanskrit words or phrases occurring in the running text are transliterated and accompanied by a translation at least once. This is designed to provide access for those having limited knowledge of Sanskrit, and for non-readers of the *devanāgarī* script.

4. *Text references* are abbreviated; full titles appear only in the running text of the entry (in bold face). The **List of Abbreviations** provides the full titles, and the **General Bibliography** notes the text editions and translations used.

5. A **Select Bibliography** is appended to each article; this contains references to secondary literature to which the author refers. These references are not exhaustive but are relevant to tracing further information about the concept.

6. The *etymologies*, whether traditional or based on modern linguistics, represent the opinion of the author; they have sometimes been edited, and in cases of doubt or difference of opinion the reader is referred to Manfred Mayrhofer, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen*, Heidelberg (Carl Winter) 1986 ff.

7. All *translations* are acknowledged, whether published (see **Bibliography**) or unpublished. If a translator's name is not given, the text has been translated by the author. Where the author has amended a previous translation, this is indicated.

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8. The lexicon is *illustrated with line-drawings* only, representing fundamental diagrams, *yantras*, symbols etc. Full photographic illustration of art-historical developments and variations falls outside the purview of these volumes.

III. Concepts of the Elements

After treating the concepts of space and time in the second volume, this third volume of **Kalātattvakośa** is dedicated to the cosmic elements and related concepts. Any creation, whether cosmic, of the human body, or of art, has to start from the four, or mostly five, elements: earth, water, fire, air and space. They are conceived as the building blocks of the universe and of the human body. Whether physically or symbolically, they constitute primary and indispensable categories of reality (*tattva*). The elements are never seen only at their gross, material level (*adhibhūta, sthūla*), because they contain a subtle as well as divine level (*adhidaiva, adhyātma* or *sūkṣma, para*).

The number five is significant throughout Indian cosmology, and the three groups of five *tattvas* or categories permeate all fields of Indian thought. There exists a correlation between the five elements (*bhūta*), their subtle forms (*tanmātra*, i.e. *śabda* or sound, *sparśa* or touch, *rūpa* or form, *rasa* or taste, and *gandha* or smell) and the corresponding sense-organs which perceive them (*indriya*). In the present volume only the concepts of the *bhūtas* are dealt with, which partly include their *tanmātra* aspect. The *indriyas* will form a separate entry in the subsequent volume (IV) which is going to be complementary and in continuation of the present one.

The basic concept of *prakṛti*, primal nature or materiality, which is so to say the matrix of all the elements, is presented first, since it gives the general background of the understanding of nature. Besides the five individual elements, the concept of being or element (*bhūta/mahābhūta*) has been treated here, which also serves to present the overall conception inclusive of the five elements. Besides, the concepts denoting fire and light are so rich in the Indian tradition that it seemed necessary to present them in two separate articles: *agni* for the element (and divinity) and *jyotis/tejas/prakāśa* for the various aspects of light and luminosity, in spite of a certain overlapping, especially in the case of *tejas* which is also used to denote the element.

Thus the present volume contains eight major articles. The sequence of the elements follows the order which, since the **Taittirīya Upaniṣad**, has become most common in the Indian systems, namely from the subtle to the gross: *ākāśa* (space), *vāyu* (air or wind), *agni* (fire), along with *jyotis* (light), *ap* (water),

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and *pṛthivī* (earth). Needless to say that all the synonyms of these elements are included, though not exhaustively. In Vedic cosmogony water mostly stood first, in some cases the order starts from the earth, i.e. from the gross to the subtle. Since many fundamental texts refer to all the five elements, certain repetitions could not be avoided. They may still be useful in the sense that each article stands for itself and can be read separately.

The system of correlations of Indian cosmology which we find in the Vedic and Tāntric world views, as also in Buddhist and Jaina thought, is first of all based on the primordial elements. The macro- and microcosmic levels permeate the whole view of reality in the various schools and disciplines. It is here where cosmogony/cosmology, ritual as enactment and re-enactment of the cosmos and the Divine, and art as "transformation of nature" (A.K. Coomarswamy) and as manifestation of the same principles in aesthetic form, are interrelated. The role of the elements in any ritual, in Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*), in Āgamic and Smārtta temple or private worship (*pūjā*), in the drawing of a Buddhist *maṇḍala* or a Jaina cosmogram, is central. Not only the physical use of fire and water and the symbolic meaning of the conch, of the water jar (*kalaśa*) and other implements of ritual require the elements, but also the spiritual process of the purification of the elements in the body of the worshipper (*bhūtaśuddhi*) shows that an ascent to the Divine has to symbolically or mystically pass through the stages of the *tattvas*. In Śaivite intitiation, the disciple has to purify the elements and assume their spiritual nature; in the words of Abhinavagupta:

> If the earth, which is firm, is contemplated as of the nature of Śiva, (the disciple) is firmly established, and by such a contemplation, he is purified. Water (contemplated as Śiva) nourishes him, and (the contemplation of) fire makes him resplendent. By contact with air (as Śiva) he attains bliss, and (the contemplation of) space carries him to vast expansion.
>
> Tantrāloka VII.103–4

In fact, the five elements, along with three others (sun, moon and self), are said to constitute the divine body of Śiva (*aṣṭamūrti*). The Śivaliṅga is built up in correspondence with the elements, and five temples in South India house the Liṅgas of the five elements. There is a system of correspondences of five symbolic shapes, five colours, divine emblems and qualities, and also five letters of the Sanskrit alphabet in the phonematic creation of the universe.

The five elements constitute the body according to Āyurveda. In the different arts and in aesthetics, the elements play an indispensable role, whether physically, symbolically or conceptually.

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In preparation of the present volume, most of these aspects of nature and the elements have been explored in a series of five seminars with the overall title *Prakṛti*, which have been published in five volumes.[2] The third volume refers especially to the role of the elements in the Arts and in aesthetics, and their background in the Āgmas and in ritual.[3] Thus the two publications are complementary.

The articles contained in this volume can present only a fraction of the richness of Indian thought on creation, nature and the elements. But bringing together the most important references and meanings of these concepts should not only present a textual and historical survey. This volume can serve as basic source material for an Indian ecology, which may have far-reaching consequences. For a present-day view on ecology has to be based on the insights and experiences of an ancient culture which lived in harmonious interaction with the forces of nature. The arts serve as a bridge between concepts, myths, ritual and life forms, and hence they particularly express and mediate an ecological consciousness. If even today a dancer first touches the ground and asks the earth for forgiveness and permission to step on her, whether consciously or unconsciously, this gesture expresses a deep respect for the earth and a harmonious relationship with the elements.

This is all the more necessary in our present time of man's uprootedness from the earth, alienation from nature and violation of the elements by environmental pollution. Any ecological action has to start from an awareness of the significance of the elements within a balanced world-view. In India it can build on an ancient tradition which, rightly understood and applied, could help solve many present-day problems the world over.

Acknowledgements

In the process of editing I have been greatly assisted by Dr. Mark Dyczkowski who revised the English and suggested improvements in some of the articles. Dr. R.S. Bhattacharya read the articles critically and suggested corrections and additions. I wish to thank Dr. Prem Lata Sharma for her readiness to supply material for the sections on **Nāṭya-Śāstra** and on music, and for her continued support in this project. Dr. S. Chattopadhyay assisted me in preparing the article *vāyu*, and generally in the editing process at every stage. In the collection of material and proof-reading the research staff of IGNCA, Varanasi Office, has been very helpful: Dr. N.C. Panda, Ms Pranati Ghosal and

[2]Kapila Vatsyayan (Gen. Ed.) **Prakṛti, The Integral Vision.** IGNCA and D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, 1995, 5 vols.

[3]**The Āgamic Tradition and the Arts**, Vol. III, ed. by B. Bäumer.

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Sri Sadananda Das. Sri S. Dorai has prepared the drawings with his traditional skill. Prof. M.A. Dhaky and Dr. P.K. Agrawal have given some suggestions for the illustrations. The entire text has been composed in the computer by Sri D.K. Sahoo and Sri G.K. Chatterjee.

Finally, I wish to thank the contributors to this volume for their ready cooperation. Any project of this kind depends upon the contributors and their understanding. This collaboration has been a rewarding experience.

Guru Pūrṇimā
July 12, 1995

Bettina Bäumer

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ABBREVIATIONS

General principles in forming abbreviations, concerning the last part of the title:

Ā	Āgama
Ār	Āraṇyaka
Bh	Bhāṣya
Br	Brāhmaṇa
Ca	Carita
Dh	Dharma (e.g. DhŚ Dharmaśāstra)
G	Gītā
H	Hṛdaya
Kā	Kārikā
Ko	Kośa
L	Lakṣaṇa
Nik	Nikāya
P	Paddhati
Prad	Pradīpikā
Prak	Prakāśa
Prāt	Prātiśākhya
Pur	Purāṇa
R	Ratnākara
Sam	Saṃhitā
Samu	Samuccaya
Saṅg	Saṅgraha
Sā	Sāra
Ś	Śāstra
Sm	Smṛti
Sū	Sūtra
T	Tantra
Up	Upaniṣad
Vā	Vārttika
V	Veda
Vim	Vimarśinī
Vi	Vivaraṇa
Vṛ	Vṛtti
Y	Yāmala

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Sections of Āgamic Texts:

cp	caryāpāda
kp	kriyāpāda
vp	vidyāpāda
yp	yogapāda

Sections of Āyurvedic Texts:

CiSthā	Cikitsā Sthāna
ISthā	Indriya Sthāna
KaSthā	Kalpa Sthāna
NiSthā	Nidāna Sthāna
ŚāSthā	Śārīra Sthāna
SiSthā	Siddhi Sthāna
SūSthā	Sūtra Sthāna
ViSthā	Vimāna Sthāna

Major Texts

AbhidhKo	Abhidharma Kośa
AbhidhSamu	Abhidharma Samuccaya
AbhŚāk	Abhijñānaśākuntala
Abhil	Abhilaṣitārtha-cintāmaṇi (also Mānasollāsa)(Someśvara)
AbhiBhā	Abhinava Bhāratī
AbhDar	Abhinaya Darpaṇa
AbhisAl	Abhisamayālaṅkāra
AbhNāṭ	Abhiṣeka Nāṭaka
AdhSū	Adhyayana-Sūtra
AghŚP	Aghoraśivācārya Paddhati
AgPur	Agni Purāṇa
AhSam	Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā
AitĀr	Aitareya Āraṇyaka
AitBr	Aitareya Brāhmaṇa
AitUp	Aitareya Upaniṣad
AjitĀ	Ajitāgama
ĀlP	Ālāpa Paddhati
AmKo	Amara Kośa
AparPṛ	Aparājita Pṛcchā
ĀpDhSū	Āpastamba Dharma-Sūtra

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ĀpGṛhSū	Āpastamba Gṛhya-Sūtra
ĀpŚrSū	Āpastamba Śrauta-Sūtra
ĀpŚulSū	Āpastamba Śulba-Sūtra
ArthŚ	Artha-Śāstra
ArthViSū	Arthaviniścaya-Sūtra
ĀryaMS	Āryamañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti
ĀśCū	Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi (Śaktibhadra)
AṣṭH	Aṣṭāṅga-Hṛdaya (Vāgbhaṭa-I)
AṣṭSaṅg	Aṣṭāṅga-Saṅgraha (Vāgbhaṭa-II)
AṣṭPrPār	Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñā Pāramitā
ĀśvaGṛhSū	Āśvalāyana Gṛhya-Sūtra
ĀśvaŚrSū	Āśvalāyana Śrauta-Sūtra
AV	Atharva-Veda (Śaunaka)
AVPari	Atharva-Veda Pariśiṣṭa
Aṭṭh	Aṭṭhasālinī (on Dhammasaṅgaṇi)
Aucitya	Aucityavicāracarcā (Kṣemendra)
Avim	Avimāraka
BālCa	Bālacarita
BDhSū	Baudhāyana Dharma-Sūtra
BGṛhSū	Baudhāyana Gṛhya-Sūtra
BŚrSū	Baudhāyana Śrauta-Sūtra
BŚulSū	Baudhāyana Śulba-Sūtra
BhG	Bhagavad-Gītā
BhGŚBh	Bhagavad-Gītā Bhāṣya (Śaṅkara)
BhāgPur	Bhāgavata Purāṇa
BhaĀr	Bhagavatī Ārādhanā (Ācārya Śivārya)
BhSi	Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu (Rūpa Gosvāmin)
BhRas	Bhaktirasāyana (Madhusūdana Sarasvatī)
BhārŚrSū	Bhāradvāja Śrauta-Sūtra
BhaBh	Bharata Bhāṣya (Nānyadeva)
BhāPari	Bhāṣāpariccheda
BhPrak	Bhāva Prakāśana (Śāradātanaya)
BhṛSam	Bhṛgu Saṃhitā
BhuPr	Bhuvana Pradīpa
BoBhū	Bodhisattvabhūmi
BoCar	Bodhicaryāvatāra
BrPur	Brahma Purāṇa
BrSū	Brahma-Sūtra
BrSūBh	Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya (Śaṅkara)
BṛUp	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad

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BṛD	Bṛhaddeśī (Mataṅga)
BṛDev	Bṛhaddevatā (Śaunaka)
BṛSam	Bṛhat Saṃhitā (Varāhamihira)
BudCa	Buddhacarita
CarSam	Caraka Saṃhitā
Cāru	Cārudatta
ChaSū	Chandaḥ-Sūtra
ChUp	Chāndogya Upaniṣad
CiL	Citra-Lakṣaṇa
DBhūSū	Daśabhūmika-Sūtra
DCa	Daśakumāracarita
DaRū	Daśarūpaka
Datti	Dattilam (Dattila)
DBhāgPur	Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa
DPur	Devī Purāṇa
DhPad	Dhammapada
DhSaṅ	Dhammasaṅgaṇi
Dhav	Dhavalā (Vīrasenācārya, Comm. on Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama)
DhvĀl	Dhvanyāloka
DhvĀlLoc	Dhvanyāloka-Locana (Abhinavagupta)
DīghNik	Dīgha Nikāya
Divyāv	Divyāvadāna
DSaṅg	Dravyasaṅgraha (Nemicandra)
DSaṅgVṛ	Dravyasaṅgraha Vṛtti (Brahma Deva)
DuSapta	Durgā Saptaśatī
Dūgh	Dūtaghaṭotkaca
GāSa	Gāhā Sattasai (Gāthā Saptaśatī)
Gaṇar	Gaṇaratnamahodadhi
GarPur	Garuḍa Purāṇa
GauKā	Gauḍapāda-Kārikā
GauDhSū	Gautama Dharma-Sūtra
GomJīv	Gommaṭasāra Jīvakāṇḍa (Nemicandra)
GoBr	Gopatha Brāhmaṇa
HBVil	Haribhaktivilāsa
HyPrad	Haṭhayoga Pradīpikā
HayaPāñc	Hayaśīrṣa Pāñcarātra
HT	Hevajra Tantra
ĪśGP	Īśānaśivagurudeva Paddhati
ĪśUp	Īśa Upaniṣad
ĪPraKā	Īśvara Pratyabhijñā-Kārikā (Utpaladeva)

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ĪPraVim	Īśvara Pratyabhijñā Vimarśinī
ĪPraVivVim	Īśvara Pratyabhijñā Vivṛti Vimarśinī
ĪśSam	Īśvara Saṃhitā
JaimUpBr	Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa
JaySam	Jayākhya Saṃhitā
JinSam	Jina Saṃhitā
JīvPradṬī	Jīvatattvapradīpikā Ṭīkā (on Gommaṭasāra Jīvakāṇḍa)
Jñān	Jñānārṇava (Śubhacandra)
Kād	Kādambarī
KāCaT	Kālacakra Tantra
KāPur	Kālikā Purāṇa
KāmKVil	Kāma-Kalā-Vilāsa
KāmSū	Kāma-Sūtra
KāmĀ	Kāmikāgama
KāśSam	Kāśyapa Saṃhitā
KāśŚi	Kāśyapa Śilpa
KāṭhSam	Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā
KaṭhUp	Kaṭha Upaniṣad
KāVṛ	Kāśikā Vṛtti
KātBhāSū	Kātyāyana Bhāṣika-Sūtra
KātŚrSū	Kātyāyana Śrauta-Sūtra
KātŚulSū	Kātyāyana Śulba-Sūtra
KauṣUp	Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad
Kāvyād	Kāvyādarśa
Kāvyāl	Kāvyālaṅkāra (Bhāmaha)
KāvyālSū	Kāvyālaṅkāra-Sūtra (Vāmana)
KāMīm	Kāvya-Mīmāṃsā
KāPrak	Kāvya Prakāśa
KeUp	Kena Upaniṣad
Kod	Kodaṇḍamaṇḍana
KulT	Kulārṇava Tantra
Kum	Kumārasambhava
KūrPur	Kūrma Purāṇa
LYVās	Laghu Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha (Abhinanda)
LT	Lakṣmī Tantra
Lalitā	Lalitā-Sahasranāma (with Bhāṣya)
LVi	Lalitavistara
Līlā	Līlāvatī (Bhāskarācārya)
MāDhā	Mādhavīyā Dhātuvṛtti
MāKā	Mādhyamaka-Kārikā

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MBh	Mahābhārata
Mahābh	Mahābhāṣya
MNUp	Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad
MNPrak	Mahānaya Prakāśa
MPur	Mahā Purāṇa
MaMa	Mahārtha Mañjarī
MSSaṅg	Mahāsubhāṣita Saṅgraha (Ed. L. Sternbach)
MVas	Mahāvastu
Maca	Mahāvīracarita
MSūAl	Mahāyāna Sūtrālaṅkāra
MaViṃ	Mahāyāṇaviṃśaka
MaitSam	Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā
MaitUp	Maitrī Upaniṣad
MajNik	Majjhima Nikāya
MālMā	Mālatīmādhava
MvM	Mālavikāgnimitra
MVT	Mālinīvijayottara Tantra
MāMey	Mānameyodaya
MāSā	Mānasāra
MānŚrSū	Mānava Śrauta-Sūtra
MānŚulSū	Mānava Śulba-Sūtra
MāṇḍKā	Māṇḍūkya-Kārikā
MāṇḍUp	Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad
MMK	Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa
Manu	Manu Smṛti
MarSam	Marīci Saṃhitā (Vaikhānasa Āgama)
MārkPur	Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa
MPĀ	Mataṅgapārameśvara Āgama
MatPur	Matsya Purāṇa
Mayam	Mayamata
MilPañ	Milinda Pañha
MīmNyPrak	Mīmāṃsānyāya Prakāśa (Āpodeva)
MīmSū	Mīmāṃsā-Sūtra (with Śābara Bhāṣya)
MedKo	Medinī Kośa
Megh	Meghadūta
MKā	Mokṣa-Kārikā
Mṛcch	Mṛcchakaṭika
MṛgĀ	Mṛgendra Āgama
Mudrā	Mudrārākṣasa
Mūl	Mūlācāra (Ācārya Vaṭṭakera)
MuṇḍUp	Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad

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NādaKā	Nāda-Kārikā (Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha)
Nāgā	Nāgānanda
Ṇāsā	Ṇāṇasāra (Jñānasāra) (Padmasingh Munirāja)
NārBhSū	Nārada Bhakti-Sūtra
NārŚik	Nāradīya Śikṣā
NN	Nartana Nirṇaya
NLRKo	Nāṭakalakṣaṇaratna Kośa (Sāgaranandin)
NŚ	Nāṭya-Śāstra
Np	Navapadārtha (Ācārya Bhikṣu)
Nay	Nayacakra (Māilladhavala)
NT	Netra Tantra
Nigh	Nighaṇṭu
Nir	Nirukta (Yāska)
NiSā	Niyamasāra (Kundakundācārya)
NRKo	Nṛttaratna Kośa
NṛtRat	Nṛttaratnāvalī (Jāyasenāpati)
NyDīp	Nyāyadīpikā (Dharma Bhūṣaṇa)
NySū	Nyāya-Sūtra
NySūBh	Nyāya-Sūtra Bhāṣya
PPur	Padma Purāṇa
PSam	Padma Saṃhitā (Pāñcarātra School)
Pañcad	Pañcadaśī
Pañ(P)	Pañcādhyāyī (Pūrvārdha) (Rājamalla)
Pañ(U)	Pañcādhyāyī (Uttarārdha) (Rājamalla)
Pañca	Pañcarātra
PkāSā	Pañcāstikāya Sāra (Kundakundācārya)
Pañc	Pañcatantra
Pā	Pāṇini Aṣṭādhyāyī
PāDhā	Pāṇinīya Dhātupāṭha
PāŚik	Pāṇinīya Śikṣā
PPra	Paramātma Prakāśa (Yogīndu Deva)
ParSam	Parameśvara Saṃhitā
PārāŚik	Pārāśara Śikṣā
PTrī	Parātrīśikā (Tantra)
PāśuSū	Pāśupata-Sūtra
PauṣĀ	Pauṣkara Āgama
PauṣSam	Pauṣkara Saṃhitā
PSā	Pavayaṇasāra (Pravacanasāra) (Kundakundācārya)
PraCan	Prabodhacandrodaya
PraPañ	Prakaraṇapañcikā
PramMīm	Pramāṇamīmāṃsā (Hemacandrācārya)

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PraRat	Prameya Ratnāvalī (Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa)
PSāT	Prapañcasāra Tantra
PP	Prasannapadā
PraUp	Praśna Upaniṣad
PraYau	Pratijñā Yaugandharāyaṇa
PraNāṭ	Pratimā Nāṭaka
PrH	Pratyabhijñā-Hṛdaya
PravBh	Pravacana Bhāṣya on Sāṃkhya-Sūtra (Vijñānabhikṣu)
Pug	Puggalapaññatti
Rāga	Rāgavibodha (Somanātha)
Ragh	Raghuvaṃśa
RājTar	Rājataraṅgiṇī
RāVā	Rājavārtika (Bhaṭṭa Akalaṅkadeva)
Rām	Rāmāyaṇa
RāmCam	Rāmāyaṇa Campū
RasGa	Rasagaṅgādhara (Jagannātha)
RaPa	Ratnatraya-Parīkṣā
RauĀ	Raurava Āgama
ṚV	Ṛgveda
ṚSar	Ṛk Sarvānukramaṇī
Ṛtu	Ṛtusaṃhāra
SaddhPuSū	Saddharma Puṇḍarīka-Sūtra
ṢaḍBr	ṢaḍViṃśa Brāhmaṇa
SāDar	Sāhitya-Darpaṇa
ŚPar	Śaiva Paribhāṣā
SamāRāj	Samādhirāja
SamSūt	Samarāṅgaṇa-Sūtradhāra (Bhoja)
SV	Sāma-Veda
SViBr	Sāmavidhāna Brāhmaṇa
SāṃKā	Sāṃkhya-Kārikā
SāṃSū	Sāṃkhya-Sūtra
SDām	Saṅgīta-Dāmodara
SDar	Saṅgīta-Darpaṇa
SMak	Saṅgīta-Makaranda
SRāj	Saṅgītarāja
SR	Saṅgīta-Ratnākara (Śārṅgadeva)
SaṅkSūr	Saṅkalpasūryodaya (Veṅkaṭanātha)
ŚāṅkhĀr	Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka
ŚāṅkhBr	Śāṅkhāyana Brāhmaṇa
ŚāṅkhŚrSū	Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta-Sūtra

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ŚāTil	Śāradā-Tilaka
Sark	Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa (Alaṅkāra-Śāstra)
SarDSaṅg	Sarvadarśana-Saṅgraha
SaSi	Sarvārthasiddhi (Ācārya Pūjyapāda)
ŚBr	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
ṢaṭĀ	Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama (Puṣpadanta & Bhūtabali)
ṢaṭSan	Ṣaṭsandarbha (Śivagosvāmin)
SātSam	Sātvata Saṃhitā
Saun	Saundarananda
SLah	Saundaryalaharī
SiddhSaṅg	Siddhāntaleśa-Saṅgraha
SiddhŚir	Siddhānta-Śiromaṇi
ŚikSamu	Śikṣāsamuccaya
ŚiL	Śilpalakṣaṇa
ŚiPrak	Śilpa Prakāśa (Rāmacandra Kaulācāra)
ŚiRaKo	Śilparatnakośa (Sthāpaka Nirañjana Mahāpātra)
Śiśu	Śiśupālavadha
ŚDṛ	Śivadṛṣṭi (Somānanda)
ŚMSt	Śivamahimnastotra
ŚPur	Śiva Purāṇa
ŚSto	Śiva Stotrāvalī
ŚSū	Śiva-Sūtra
ŚSūVā	Śiva-Sūtra Vārttika (Varadācārya)
ŚSūVim	Śiva-Sūtra Vimarśinī (Kṣemarāja)
SkaPur	Skanda Purāṇa
ŚlVā	Ślokavārttika
SP	Somaśambhu Paddhati
SpKā	Spanda-Kārikā
ŚrīBh	Śrī Bhāṣya (on Brahma-Sūtra)
ŚrīkBh	Śrīkaṇṭha Bhāṣya (on Brahma-Sūtra)
ŚTaCi	Śrītattvacintāmaṇi
ŚṛPrak	Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa
ŚNSā	Śukranītisāra
SūrSiddh	Sūrya-Siddhānta
SuSam	Suśruta Saṃhitā
SvT	Svacchanda Tantra
Svap	Svapnavāsavadatta
ŚvUp	Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad
TĀr	Taittirīya Āraṇyaka
TBr	Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa

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TSam	Taittirīya Saṃhitā
TUp	Taittirīya Upaniṣad
TāṇḍMBr	Tāṇḍya Mahābrāhmaṇa
TĀl	Tantrāloka (Abhinavagupta)
TSamu	Tantrasamuccaya
TSā	Tantrasāra (Abhinavagupta)
TaBhā	Tarka Bhāṣā
TarkSaṅg	Tarka-Saṅgraha
TaKau	Tattva Kaumudī
TaPrak	Tattva Prakāśa
TaSū	Tattvārthādhigama-Sūtra (Tattvārtha-Sūtra)
TaSā	Tattvārthasāra (Amṛtacandra)
TaSaṅg	Tattva-Saṅgraha
TiPa	Tiloya Paṇṇattī (Vṛṣabhācārya)
UbhSā	Ubhayābhisārikā
UjNīl	Ujjvalanīlamaṇi
USū	Uttarādhyāyana-Sūtra
UttCa	Uttararāmacarita
VaiKo	Vaijayantī Kośa
VaiśSū	Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra
VaiśSūBh	Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra Bhāṣya
VaJī	Vakroktijīvita
Vak	Vākyapadīya
VāPur	Vāmana Purāṇa
VŚ	Vāstu-Śāstra (Viśvakarman)
VSUp	Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad
VVid	Vāstuvidyā (Viśvakarman)
VedPar	Vedānta-Paribhāṣā
VedSā	Vedānta-Sāra
Veṇī	Veṇī Saṃhāra
Vibh	Vibhaṅga Pāli
ViBhai	Vijñāna Bhairava
VijMSi	Vijñapti Mātratā Siddhi
Vik	Vikramorvaśīya
VinPiṭ	Vinaya Piṭaka
VDhPur	Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa
ViPur	Viṣṇu Purāṇa
ViSahasrBh	Viṣṇu-Sahasranāma Bhāṣya
ViSm	Viṣṇu Smṛti
ViMag	Visuddhimagga
VyVive	Vyaktiviveka (Mahimabhaṭṭa)

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YājŚik	Yājñavalkya Śikṣā
YājSm	Yājñavalkya Smṛti
YV	Yajur-Veda (Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā)
YSū	Yoga-Sūtra
YSūBh	Yoga-Sūtra Bhāṣya (Vyāsa)
YVās	Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha
YYāj	Yogi Yājñavalkya
YoH	Yoginī-Hṛdaya
YuDīp	Yuktidīpikā (on Sāṃkhya-Kārikā)

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PRAKṚTI

Overview

Prakṛti (f.) is best known as the term for the material side of the duality of matter and consciousness (*puruṣa*) in the Sāṃkhya and Yoga systems of religious thought. *Prakṛti* is a common term in Sanskrit texts not only belonging to the Sāṃkhya and Yoga systems however, but also to the texts of phonetics, grammar, ritual theory, medicine, political theory, drama, mythology and theology. The Sanskrit technical term *prakṛti* refers to nature and the natural in Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Jainism and the Medical schools. These schools tried to understand materiality by means of empirical observations of the processes and regularities of the person and the environment. They attempted to find explanations of the universe and life by their own efforts and powers of reasoning and they were particularly interested in the analysis of matter.

Three clusters of meanings of the term *prakṛti* in the Indian traditions can be distinguished: 1. *Prakṛti* is that which precedes, the first, that which is in its own form. This is the basis, the original state, therefore the natural, the archetype and normal. From this sense is also derived the meaning health and normality, the ordinary and usual. 2. *Prakṛti* is the material cause, the producer of effects, the innate power of transformation and manifestation, the generative principle or the principle of growth. Here *prakṛti* is a word concerned with the field of birth and production. 3. *Prakṛti* as the principles, constituents, parts or components of a whole (components of the human being, of the political state, of the cosmos, of a play, etc.).

Prakṛti is used in the Sanskrit literature from the time of the texts which instruct in various activities related to the rituals, in the Jaina Ardha-Māgadhī scriptures and in the Pāli Canon of the Buddhists. The adjective *prākṛta* is used already in the **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa**. The word *prakṛti* in the modern North Indian languages is usually translated with 'nature', 'habit', 'disposition' and 'temperament'. *Prakṛtivāda* means 'naturalism' according to the dictionary, and *prakṛtivādī* is a 'naturalist'.

In the systematic religious thought of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, *prakṛti* is materiality and the opposite of pure consciousness (*puruṣa*). Unmanifest materiality is independent, all-pervasive, precedes the existence of time and space and is a material transcendent principle, immensely powerful, containing the whole world in an undifferentiated state. The other transcendent principle, *puruṣa* is

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also unmanifest, eternal, etc. but, contrary to *prakṛti*, it is contentless. *Prakṛti* is the productive, transforming and material aspect of nature and also nature as a unity. The continuous transformations of materiality should be analyzed or suppressed (*cittavṛttinirodhaḥ*) to attain liberation of the self (*puruṣa*). The analysis of the processes of transformation of the material world is developed, therefore, in order to provide a soteriological 'map' for withdrawal from the life-process which is characterized by the torment of threefold pain (*duḥkhatrayābhighāta*). The embodied person and the cosmos are constituted of the same matter and similarly structured. They are both analyzed into 25 principles (*tattvas*) and are described as a combination of souls, material productive principles (*prakṛtis*) and material products (*vikṛtis*). *Puruṣa* from the ultimate point of view is not analyzable since he can never become an object. The root-matter (*mūlaprakṛti*), intellect (*buddhi*), egoity (*ahaṃkāra*), and the five subtle elements (*tanmātras*), sometimes the gross elements (*mahābhūtas*) are *prakṛtis* because they produce the sixteen modified (*vikṛti*) principles (*tattvas*). The three constituents (*guṇas*) of *mūlaprakṛti* are the sentient or intelligibility principle (*sattva*) (defined as *prakāśa* in the Sāṃkhya-Kārikā 13 and Yoga-Sūtra II.18 and as *prakāśaśīla* in the Vyāsa Bhāṣya II.18), the mutative principle (*rajas*) and the static principle (*tamas*).

In the Prātiśākhya, the literature on phonetics (*śikṣā*), *prakṛti* has the meaning of original sound, the basis, which might remain unchanged or can change according to rules of euphonic combination (*sandhi*). *Prakṛti* also means the material causes of sound. The Padapāṭha, the text in which each word is listed separately, to help in recitation, in contrast to the Saṃhitā (*saṃ – dhā-*, 'join', 'connect') text, in which letters are combined according to euphonic rules, is called *prakṛti* because it is based on the Saṃhitā text or because in the *padapāṭha* the words are in their unchanged original (*prakṛti*) form or, from the practical point of view, because one first learns the *pada* text and then puts the words together, or because when one constructs sentences one starts with the *padas*.

In the **Mīmāṃsā-Sūtra** and other texts dealing with instructions and explanations of the ritual, *prakṛti* means the archetypal or model sacrifices. These sacrifices have been fully described in the ritual texts, and the modified sacrifices (*vikṛtis*) which have not been fully described, are dependent on these archetypes.

In the grammar (*vyākaraṇa*) the roots and stems from which, when suffixes and prefixes are added, numerous words are produced, are called *prakṛti*.

In the medical literature *prakṛti* means physical health, one's natural condition, and is contrasted to disease (*vikṛti*). *Prakṛti* also means one's constitution and temperament as determined by the *doṣas*. Seven types (*prakṛti*) of persons

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are distinguished according to which of the *doṣas* predominates.

In the **Nāṭya-Śāstra**, the foundation text of the science of dance and theatre, *prakṛti* means the infinite variety of human characters. It also means elements of the plot (*arthaprakṛti*).

In the **Artha-Śāstra**, the science of politics, *prakṛti* means constituents of the state, and constituents of the *maṇḍala* or the circle of near and distant states with whom the state has political relations.

In theology and mythology, *prakṛti* is the material cause of the universe, often an emanation of God or controlled by God by means of his creative power (*māyā*). This is documented in the **Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad** (IV.10) and **Bhagavad-Gītā** (IV.6, VII.14), the early theistic texts belonging to Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism. *Prakṛti* is like a consort of a male god who is fertilized by his energies. There is a tendency in some speculations about divinity to have goddesses personify *prakṛti* as the active female principle (*śakti*) and gods personify *puruṣa* as the passive male principle, analogous to, but different from, the *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* of Sāṃkhya and Yoga systems of religious thought. Personifying *prakṛti* implies ascribing consciousness to it, while in Sāṃkhya and Yoga the fundamental dualism is between consciousness (*puruṣa*) and non-conscious materiality (*prakṛti*).

In the creation mythology of Purāṇas, the mythological collections of the Hindu theistic sectarian movements, *prakṛti* is sometimes identified with the inert mass of the waters which is then fertilized by the male god. In this mythology the products of *prakṛti* also become the constituents of the cosmic egg.

Etymology and Related Terms

Prakṛti is a feminine noun made with the root *kṛ*-, the prefix '*pra*', and the suffix '*ktin*' (Pā III.3.93). The root *kṛ*- signifies action. It means to 'make', 'cause', 'create', 'produce' or 'perform'. It is the same root as in *karma* (act), *kāraṇa* (cause, origin), *kārya* (effect), all emphasizing the causal aspect of activity. The prefix '*pra*' shows it precedes and it also has the sense of forward movement. '*Pra*' indicates a creative force, the urge to create, a biological and natural process. The '*ti*' suffix usually forms feminine nouns.

The **Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa** (Prakṛtikhaṇḍa, Ch.I) and **Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa** (Book IX, Ch.I) give some popular etymologies of *prakṛti*. In these texts *prakṛti* is a name of the goddess who is said to consist of the five forms of Durgā, Rādhā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Sāvitrī.

प्रकृष्टवाचकः प्रश्च कृतिश्च सृष्टिवाचकः ।

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सृष्टौ प्रकृष्टा या देवी प्रकृतिः सा प्रकीर्तिता ॥
गुणे सत्त्वे प्रकृष्टे च प्रशब्दो वर्तते श्रुतः ।
मध्यमे रजसि कृश्च तिशब्दस्तमसि स्मृतः ॥
त्रिगुणात्मस्वरूपा या सा च शक्तिसमन्विता ।
प्रधाना सृष्टिकरणे प्रकृतिस्तेन कथ्यते ॥
प्रथमे वर्तते प्रश्च कृतिश्च सृष्टिवाचकः ।
सृष्टेरादौ च या देवी प्रकृतिः सा प्रकीर्तिता ॥

DBhāgPur IX.1.5–8

'*Pra*' means excellent and '*kṛti*' means creation. Therefore that goddess who is the most excellent in creation is called *prakṛti*. The '*pra*' word means the most excellent *sattva guṇa*, '*kṛ*' means the middle *rajas guṇa*, and '*ti*' denotes the *tamas guṇa*. She whose own nature is *triguṇa*, is endowed with all powers. She is superior in creation, therefore she is called *prakṛti*. '*Pra*' means first, '*kṛti*' means creation. The goddess who is the beginning of creation, she is called *prakṛti*.

In this glorification of the goddess *prakṛti* is said to mean 'the most excellent in creation', she is identified with the three *guṇas* (*pra=sattva*, *kṛ=rajas*, *ti=tamas*). Also, '*pra*' is said to mean first and '*kṛti*' to mean creation. The primordial cause of creation is therefore called *prakṛti*. In another fanciful explanation '*pra*' is said to be the period just preceding creation while '*kṛti*' signifies creation. The great Devī who exists before creation, says the **Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa**, is therefore called *prakṛti* after creation.

Prakṛti means that which is the original, the first, the primary, and *vikṛti* is secondary. This is perhaps the early non-technical meaning of the word.

In Proto-Sāṃkhya, Sāṃkhya and Yoga texts, eight principal producers, *prakṛtis*, are distinguished from sixteen products, *vikṛtis*.

Prakṛti as materiality is the other pole of *puruṣa*, pure consciousness. *Prakṛti* is the active material principle that binds the passive *puruṣas* with the three strands of the rope (*triguṇa*) of materiality. Being the cause of bondage, *prakṛti* is, in the human realm, fundamentally suffering (*duḥkha*), but it also brings liberation (*mokṣa*), as it has two purposes: the ascertainment of pleasure and pain (*bhoga*) and the ascertainment of liberation (*apavarga*). *Prakṛti* binds the *puruṣas* by sending itself forth in a series of modifications (*vikṛtis*). *Prakṛti* is the first producer, and is, in Classical Sāṃkhya, contrasted with the seven *prakṛtivikṛtis*, modifications or products of matter which produce other principles (*tattvas*), and sixteen *vikāras* which produce no additional principles. The modifications are, according to the **Sāṃkhya-Kārikā** 10, dependent (*paratantra*) on *prakṛti* and supported (*āśrita*) by it. They are caused (*hetumat*),

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non-eternal (*anitya*), non-pervasive (*avyāpin*), active (*sakriya*), many (*aneka*), marked (*liṅga*), composite (*sāvayava*), while root materiality is without a cause, permanent, all-pervasive, not characterized by transmigration, unsupported, not the mark of anything and not capable of dissolution, partless and independent. *Prakṛti* produces innumerable forms but only twentythree principles. A pot is a transformation of clay which is a transformation of the earth principle (*pṛthivī mahābhūta*). Clay and pots are not new principles but they are nevertheless products of *prakṛti.*

Prakṛti in the medical texts means healthy and normal and is the opposite of illness and the abnormal (*vikṛti*). *Viprakṛti* means disease and illness.

Prakṛti as the original is opposed to the *anukṛti* (from *anu+kṛ-*), the copy or imitation.

The model sacrifices which are fully described in the ritual Sūtras are called *prakṛtis* and the modified sacrifices which are variations on them are called *vikṛtis.*

In phonetics the phonetically unaltered sound is *prakṛti.* The phonetically altered sound is called *vikṛti, vikāra* or *vikṛta.* In grammar *prakṛti* is the base and its opposite is the affix, the *pratyaya.*

A different meaning of *prakṛti* and its opposite is found in the **Vāsiṣṭha Dharma-Sūtra.** *Prakṛti* in this text means the original and inborn and is contrasted to the constructed and perfected (*saṃskṛta*, from *sam+kṛ-* meaning 'put together', 'join together', 'refine'). Persons are different according to the **Vāsiṣṭha Dharma-Sūtra** IV.1, because of inborn nature (*prakṛti-viśiṣṭa*) and because they are made different through the ritual *saṃskāras* (from '*sam+kṛ-*') (*saṃskāra-viśeṣa*). According to Vedic ritual theory the innate inborn class characteristics of the person were actualized through the rituals. By the completion of the *upanayana* ritual and the marriage *saṃskāra*, the householder was qualified for his own ritual fire, and to perform Vedic sacrifices, by which the perfection of the person was continued. The rituals were also causes of inner purification of the person since they removed impurities and made the person able to live in accordance with the Vedas. In this text *prakṛti* represents the biological natural person and *saṃskṛta* the person fashioned by culture and society.

The distinction between Prākṛta and Saṃskṛta languages reveals a perceived dualism between the natural human and the perfected divine sounds. Prākṛta means related to or derived from the *prakṛti*, the basis and original form. *Prākṛta* can mean 'common' and 'ordinary'. The later grammarians understood *prākṛta* to mean that the *prākṛta* languages were related to or derived from Sanskrit.

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Hemacandra, the eleventh century Prākṛta grammarian, wrote: "Sanskrit is the basis (*prakṛti*). That which is located in it or is derived from it that is Prākṛta" (*prakṛti saṃskṛtaṃ tatra bhavaṃ tata āgataṃ vā prākṛtam*). The second sense means Prākṛta was the language of the everyday speech of the common people.

Prākṛta, an adjective derived from *prakṛti*, means 'original', 'natural', 'ordinary', 'common to all', 'normal' and 'belonging to' or 'derived from *prakṛti*'. The adjective *prākṛta* is used already in the **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** I.1.2.7 (*etarhi prākṛtāni*).

Prākṛta is used in the mathematics and geometry of altar construction of the Vedic religion. The measuring stick used for the construction of the *agnicayana* bird altar is divided in four, each length is called *caturthī* or *prākṛta-prakrama*, 'ordinary measure'. *Prākṛta* is used often in the Epics **Mahābhārata** and **Rāmāyaṇa** in the sense of common, usual, and ordinary.

किं मामसदृशं वाक्यमीदृशं श्रोत्रदारुणम् ।
रूक्षं श्रावयसे वीर प्राकृतः प्राकृतामिव ॥

Rām VI.116.5

(Sītā spoke to Rāma:) "Why do you, Oh Hero, like a common man addressing an ordinary woman, make me hear these harsh and unbecoming words, painful unto ears?"

Arjuna is similarlly described in the **Mahābhārata**:

अयं नीलाम्बुदश्यामो नरेष्वप्रतिमो भुवि ।
शेते प्राकृतवद् भूमावतो दुःखतरं नु किम् ॥

MBh I.138.22

This Arjuna of the darkish hue of blue clouds and unequalled amongst men on the earth sleeps on the ground like an ordinary person (*prākṛtavad*). What is more painful? (Tr. P.C. Roy)

Prākṛta also means unrefined or ignorant (*asaṃskṛtabuddhi, anadhigatavidya*):

अयुक्तः प्राकृतः स्तब्धः शठो नैष्कृतिकोऽलसः ।
विषादी दीर्घसूत्री च कर्ता तामस उच्यते ॥

BhG XVIII.28

Undisciplined, unrefined (*prākṛta*), stubborn, false, dishonest, lazy, despondent and procrastinating. Such an agent is said to be tāmasic.

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This use of *prākṛta* to characterize a *tāmasika* person is related, perhaps, to a common use in the Pāli Canon. In the Pāli Canon *prakṛti* (in Pāli *pakati*) is sometimes used to characterize undisciplined persons who have not restrained their natural impulses. Both texts contrast *prākṛta* to the restrained controlled person. In the **Theragāthā** (258) the behaviour of unworthy *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* when the last time has come is characterized as unrestrained (*prākṛta*). The compound *pakatindriya* meaning uncontrolled is used in the **Udāna** to characterize monks whose behaviour is declared to be controlled by *Māra.*

The most important synonyms of *prakṛti* in Sāṃkhya and Yoga are *pradhāna*, the principal or foremost, denoting the first of the eight *prakṛtis* of Sāṃkhya, and most common in the yoga-context, and *avyakta*, the unmanifest principle, the equilibrium stage of materiality before the manifestation of the principles of creation. *Pradhāna* and *avyakta* are identified with *mūlaprakṛti* as the root material cause in Classical Sāṃkhya. *Prakṛti* is *prasavadharmin*, the producer, *prapañca*, the process of emanation of materiality, and *svabhāva*, the natural process. Kālidāsa writes, in the **Kumārasambhava**, that *prakṛti* is *puruṣārthapravartin*, flowing forth or moving (*pra-vṛt-*) for the sake of *puruṣa. Prakṛti* when personified in a mythological context can be identified with the goddess as *śakti* or *māyā*, god's power and concealer. In the theology of Rāmānuja *prakṛti* is identified with the body of God, that which is totally dependent on God for its existence.

Prakṛti operates in a series of compounds as a first member. Some examples are *prakṛtija*, springing from nature or innate, *prakṛtilaya*, merging with nature, *prākṛtapralaya*, dissolution of nature, *prakṛtistha*, being in the original normal state or healthy, *prakṛtimāna*, the normal measure, *prakṛtisampanna*, endowed with a noble nature or *prakṛtivādin*, an adherent of the *prakṛti* teaching, that is, Sāṃkhya. As a second member of a compound it can mean types or components as in *karmaprakṛtis* used in Jainism, meaning types of *karman*, and *arthaprakṛtis*, ingredients of plot, according to the science of theatre and dance.

The Core-Meaning of the Term

Prakṛti is that which is in its own form, the first, the original, the basis, the natural state. *Prakṛti* is the material cause, that from which something is born or comes to be, the basis, from which innumerable forms are produced. *Prakṛti* means also the natural, common and normal, and therefore the innate, as in the nature or character of the individual. The term expresses a naturalistic tendency. That is perhaps why it is used extensively in the sciences: medicine, phonology, grammar, politics, ritual theory, and in the science of liberation

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of Sāṃkhya and Yoga. The meaning of *prakṛti* of Sāṃkhya and Yoga as the productive material cause, the generative principle or the creatrix, was reworked in the theologies of Śāktism and Tāntrism and in these systems *prakṛti* refers to the goddess and women in general.

Prakṛtis in the plural usually express a group which constitutes a whole and which possesses some productive power to produce that whole. *Prakṛtis* often number seven or eight.

Development of the Concept

Prakṛti is an important term in the related sciences of phonetics, grammar, and ritual theory. These three sciences were all linked to the ritual performances of the Vedic priests. *Prakṛti* is a technical term in these sciences referring to original sounds, stems of words and the archetypal sacrifices.

The first branch of linguistics to attain independent status was the study of phonetics. The phonetic texts, the Prātiśākhyas, are probably contemporary or later than Pāṇini (350 B.C.). The inquiry into the production of sound was caused by the wish to preserve the sacred texts in the oral tradition. The Prātiśākhyas start with the historically later Pada-text (the *prakṛti* in which the *sandhi* between words are broken up and compounds are split by inserting pauses between the individual members, and give rules on how to construct from it the text in continuous recitation, the Saṃhitā text, and the text in which each word of the Padapāṭha is recited twice, first in *sandhi* with the previous word then with the following word, the Kramapāṭha text.

Prakṛti, in the Prātiśākhyas, means the basis with respect to the Saṃhitā-text, it means the material source of sounds (*varṇa*) and it means a sound that remains unchanged in euphonic combination (*prakṛtyā*).

The **Ṛk-Prātiśākhya** II.1 says: *Saṃhitā padaprakṛtiḥ*. The statement can mean both that the Pada-text is the foundation for the Saṃhitā-text, or that the Saṃhitā text is the basis for the Pada-text, depending on interpreting the compound as a *bahuvrīhi samāsa* or as a *ṣaṣṭhī tatpuruṣa samāsa*. The controversy between the *padavādins* and the *vākyavādins* arises with respect to this interpretation.

Prakṛti means material cause of sound in the Prātiśākhya literature. The **Kṛṣṇayajuḥ-Prātiśākhya** (=**Taittirīya-Prātiśākhya**) II.7 says that tone, breath and *h*-sound are the material causes (*prakṛtayaḥ*) of the sound of the syllables.

ता वर्णप्रकृतयः ।

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(Tone, breath and h-sound) these are the productive material causes of alphabetic sounds. (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

The commentary **Tribhāṣyaratna** says that the syllables have tone, breath and h-sound as material cause in the same way that clay is the material cause of jars and thread of clothes. Similarly in 22.1:

शब्दः प्रकृतिः सर्ववर्णानाम् ।

Sound is material cause of all alphabetic sounds. (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

Prakṛti means that the sound remains unchanged in euphonic combinations.

उकारोऽपृक्तः प्रकृत्या वकारोऽन्तरे ।

Kṛṣṇayajuḥ-Prāt IX.16

An '*u*' uncombined with a consonant, remains unchanged and '*v*' is inserted between it and the following vowel. (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

The **Mīmāṃsā-Sūtra** I.1.10 presents a *pūrvapakṣa* against the eternality of sound. The viewpoint represents probably the Nyāya opinion. The opponent argues that sound is not eternal unchanging since there are changes according to the rules of *sandhi*:

प्रकृतिविकृत्योश्च ॥

MīmSū I.1.10

And on account of the original and modified forms.

Śabara explains that in the case of '*dadhi*' and '*atra*' becoming '*dadhyatra*', the original '*i*' and '*a*' have changed into '*ya*'. The *i-kāra* is the *prakṛti*, the original, and the *y-kāra* is the *vikṛti*, the modification. The Mīmāṃsā view is, however, that the syllables are eternal. The answer to the objection is *varṇāntaramavikāra* (I.1.16), the change of letters is not a real modification. The words '*dadhi*' and '*atra*' still exist.

In the grammar, *prakṛti* means the roots and stems of words. 'Pāṇini's system', write Harold G. Coward and K. Kunjunni Raja (*The Philosophy of the Grammarians*, p.15), "purports to derive all the forms of the Sanskrit language...from operation on two kinds of primitive-affixes (*pratyaya*) and bases (*prakṛti*)." *Prakṛtipratyayavibhāga* is therefore the most important work of grammar. The bases are of two kinds: verbal (*dhātu*) and nominal (*prātipadika*).

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The rules in **Aṣṭādhyāyī** show how affixes are added to bases (*prakṛti*) to generate correct inflected forms of the language. The generative function of *prakṛti*, its ability to produce numerous forms, is perhaps implied in the use of *prakṛti* in grammar. Both roots and stems are *prakṛtis* in the sense that affixes are added to them. Roots are the ultimate *prakṛtis*. *Prakṛti* is also the underlying base for the secondary suffixes (*taddhita pratyaya*) added to the form derived from the root as in the example: *Lokaḥ* is the *prakṛti* for the derivative *laukika*.

In the **Mahābhāṣya** *prakṛti* also means the original Sanskrit word. This is related to the sense of *prakṛti* being the original or first.

न चापशब्दः प्रकृतिः ।

Mahābh Paspaśāhnika under Māheśvara-Sūtra 2

No non-Sanskrit word based on some Sanskrit word (*apaśabda*) is regarded as the original Sanskrit word (*prakṛti*).
(Tr. R.S. Bhattacharya)

न च विकृतिः प्रकृतिं गृह्णाति ।

Mahābh on Pā VI.1.16

A substitute (of a word) cannot take the place of the original word (*prakṛti*). (Tr. R.S. Bhattacharya)

Vikṛti means here *ādeśa*, a substitute, and *prakṛti* means the original Sanskrit word.

That *prakṛti* is a word concerning the field of birth and production was well known to Pāṇini (350 B.C.). He discussed the rules of grammatical cases associated with material cause and production.

जनिकर्तुः प्रकृतिः ।

Pā I.4.30

The material cause (*prakṛti*) of the agent of the verb to be born (*jan-*) (is in the ablative case (*apādāna kāraka*)).

Sometimes the modification of the material cause is in the dative case.

तदर्थं विकृतेः प्रकृतौ ।

Pā V.1.12

When the material cause (*prakṛti*) is serviceable for the modification (*vikṛti*), it is in the dative case.

The commentary **Kāśikā Vṛtti** (650 A.D.) explains that *prakṛti* is the material cause and *vikṛti* is a later stage of *prakṛti*. Wood is the *prakṛti* or

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material cause of charcoal, it is for the sake of that (*tadartham*), therefore charcoal is in the dative case (*aṅgārebhyo hitāni kāṣṭhāni*, wood suitable for making charcoal). In the case of water and well (*udakārtham kūpaḥ*) there is not a relationship of material cause (*prakṛti*) and effect (*vikṛti*), since the well is the instrumental cause and water is not a modification of well.

Prakṛti means material cause also in the **Brahma-Sūtra** and **Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra**. In the **Brahma-Sūtra** *prakṛti* is that which is in its original form, the base while in the **Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra** *prakṛti* means the combination of causal factors.

> प्रकृतिश्च प्रतिज्ञादृष्टान्तानुपरोधात् । BrSū I.4.23
>
> (Brahman is) the material cause also, (on account of this view alone) not being contradictory to the proposition and illustrations (cited in the Śruti). (Tr. Viresvarananda)
>
> भूयस्त्वाद् गन्धवत्त्वाच्च पृथिवी गन्धज्ञाने प्रकृतिः ।
>
> VaiśSū VIII.2.5
>
> By reason of its predominance, and of possession of smell, earth is the material cause of the olfactory sense. (Tr. N.L. Sinha)

The use of *prakṛti* as material origin is known also to the **Nirukta**. The **Nirukta** comments on the praising of objects from horses to herbs in the Vedic verses:

> अपि च सत्त्वानां प्रकृतिभूमभिर्ऋषयः स्तुवन्तीत्याहुः ।
> प्रकृतिसार्वनाम्याच्च । इतरेतरजन्मानो भवन्ति ।
> इतरेतरप्रकृतयः । Nir VII.4
>
> Or else, as people say, seers praise objects according to the multiplicities of their original nature, as well as from its universality. They are produced from each other. They are the original forms of each other. (Tr. L. Sarup)

The interdependency of the material causes of the world is here expressed. The commentator Durga illustrates this interdependency of the material world by declaring that fire, lightning and the sun are the material causes (*prakṛti*) of each other.

In Jaiminī's **Mīmāṃsā-Sūtra**, *prakṛti* is used in a large number of *sūtras* in the sense of paradigmatic original sacrifice. The model (*prakṛti*) is the archetype on which the modified sacrifices (*vikṛti*) are based. *Prakṛtis* are the sacrifices whose processes are related in full in the Vedic statements enjoining them.

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Pūrvatva (VII.1.11, VIII.1.28) the prior or model sacrifice, *apūrva* (VIII.3.25, IX.3.20) the first and *anuttara* (VIII.4.15) the principle are sometimes used as synonyms of *prakṛti*. *Darśapūrṇamāsa*, the new and the full moon sacrifices, are the archetype for all the sacrifices of oblation (*iṣṭis*). *Agniṣṭoma* is the archetype for the *soma* sacrifices, and *nirūḍha paśubandha* is the archetype for the animal sacrifices (*paśuyajña*). *Prakṛti* means here model from which innumerable modified sacrifices are derived. The details and accessories which are necessary to perform the modified sacrifices (*vikṛtis*) but which are not found prescribed, are brought in or transferred from the model sacrifices (*prakṛti*). This process is called *atideśa*. The general law of transference is: The modified sacrifice is to be performed according to the model sacrifice (*prakṛtivad vikṛtiḥ kartavyā*). The **Baudhāyana Śrauta-Sūtra** XXIV.5 says: "That which is the model (*prakṛti*) is the precedent, and that which one creates from it, is the subsequent". The principles of archetype and ecotype relate all sacrifices to each other.

न प्रकृतेरशास्त्रनिष्पत्तेः ॥

MīmSū III.3.23

Not so; by reason of not getting the command from the model sacrifice. (Tr. M.L. Sandal)

यथादेवतं वा तत्प्रकृतित्वं हि दर्शयति ॥

MīmSū III.2.29

On the other hand, according to the gods, because the model sacrifice shows it. (Tr. M.L. Sandal)

नप्रकृतेरेकसंयोगात् ॥

MīmSū III.3.19

Not so; because one sacrificer is mentioned in connection with the model sacrifice. (Tr. M.L. Sandal)

To maintain good health one should always remember one's own nature (*prakṛtimabhīkṣṇaṃ smaret*, CarSam SūSthā, VIII.27). In the Āyurvedic texts *prakṛti* means the normal, ordinary pattern, the natural way, the nature of the person, his physical constitution, and his health.

विकारो धातुवैषम्यं साम्यं प्रकृतिरुच्यते ।

CarSam SūSthā IX.4ab

Abnormality (disorder) is disequilibrium of constituents (*dhātus*) and their equilibrium is normalcy (health). (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

The **Caraka Saṃhitā** describes the normal (*prakṛti*) development of the unborn child:

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एवमस्येन्द्रियाण्यङ्गावयवाश्च यौगपद्येनाभिनिर्वर्तन्तेऽन्यत्र तेभ्यो भावेभ्यो येऽस्य जातस्योत्तरकालं जायन्ते; तद्यथा दन्ता व्यञ्जनानि व्यक्तीभावस्तथायुक्तानि चापराणि, एषा प्रकृतिः ... ।

CarSam ŚāSthā IV.14

Thus the senses and organs of the foetus are simultaneously manifested except those that are manifested only after birth. For example teeth, secondary sexual characteristics like beards and breast, signs of puberty like the production of semen and ovum and such other traits are developed later. This is the normalcy (*prakṛti*). (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

A →*dhātu* (Vol. IV) is that which sustains and upholds the body. The three elements *vāyu, pitta* and *kapha*, are counted both as constituents (*dhātus*) and as *doṣas*, or morbid elements. Space (*ākāśa*), wind, fire, water and earth are the composites of the body, as they are of the whole universe. Wind, fire and water are the principal elements which give life and movement to the body. But when these are excited or their activity stops, diseases arrive. They are therefore both the elements of the body (*tridhātus*) and the three troubles (*doṣas*→*guṇa* Vol. IV).

In the medical systems of **Suśruta Saṃhitā** and **Caraka Saṃhitā** seven types of persons or natures are distinguished according to which of the *doṣas* or morbidity factors are dominant.

दोषानुशयिता ह्येषां देहप्रकृतिरुच्यते ॥

CarSam SūSthā VII.40cd

The body constitution of persons (*dehaprakṛti*) is named according to the predominance of the *doṣas*.

Cakrapāṇi comments that *dehaprakṛti* means physical health (*dehasvāsthyam*):

तत्र प्रकृत्यादीन् भाविननुव्याख्यास्यामः । तद्यथा –
शुक्रशोणितप्रकृतिं कालगर्भाशयप्रकृतिमातुराहारविहारप्रकृतिं महाभूतविकारप्रकृतिं च गर्भशरीरमपेक्षते । एतानि हि येन येन दोषेणाधिकेनैकेनानेकेन वा समनुबध्यन्ते, तेन तेन दोषेण गर्भोऽनुबध्यते; ततः सा सा दोषप्रकृतिरुच्यते मनुष्याणां गर्भादिप्रवृत्ता । तस्माच्छ्लेष्मलाः प्रकृत्या केचित्, पित्तलाः केचित्, संसृष्टाः केचित्, समधातवः केचिद्भवन्ति ।

CarSam ViSthā VIII.95

Now I shall explain the factors *prakṛti*, etc. such as the body of

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the foetus is determined by the constitution of sperm and ovum, that of time and uterus, that of food and behaviour of the mother and that of the products of *mahābhūtas*. *Doṣa*, one or more than one, which predominates in these factors, gets attached to the foetus. This is said as '*doṣaprakṛti*' (physical or *doṣikā* constitution) of human beings emerged from the initial stage of foetus. Hence some persons are constitutionally *śleṣmala* (having predominance of *śleṣmā*), some *pittala*, some *vātala*, some having combined *doṣas* and some with balanced *dhātus*. (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

A physician should know the different types of persons.

महाप्रकृतयस्त्वेता रजःसत्त्वतमःकृताः ।
प्रोक्ता लक्षणतः सम्यग्भिषक् ताश्च विभावयेत् ॥

SuSam ŚāSthā IV.99

A physician should coolly deliberate upon the different types of temperament described herein and their characteristic features. (Tr. K.L. Bhisagratna)

The individual can be dominated by one of the *doṣas* (*vāta, pitta* and *kapha*), two in combination, or by all three in equilibrium (*doṣaprakṛti, samaprakṛti*) from the moment of conception. The persons in whom there is an equilibrium of the *doṣas* (*vāta pitta, kapha*) are healthy (*prakṛti*). The equilibrium of the original dominating *doṣa* defines health for the other types.

विषजातो यथा कीटो न विषेण विपद्यते ।
तद्वत्प्रकृतयो मर्त्यं शक्नुवन्ति न बाधितुम् ॥

SuSam ŚāSthā IV.79

As a worm, bred in poison, is not troubled with it, so the temperaments (*prakṛti*) of a person however painful to others does no inconvenience to himself. (Tr. K.L. Bhisagratna)

The dominant *doṣa* at the time of conception decides the natural body constitution.

शुक्रशोणितसंयोगे यो भवेद्दोष उत्कटः ।
प्रकृतिर्जायते तेन ... ॥

SuSam ŚāSthā IV.63

The temperament (*prakṛti*) of a man is determined by the preponderance of the particular *doṣas* at the time of his generation (actual

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combination of the semen and ovum) and is marked by that preponderant *doṣa*. (Tr. K.L. Bhisagratna)

The nature of the person is never altered and if it is, that is a sign that death is approaching.

प्रकोपो वाऽन्यथाभावो क्षयो वा नोपजायते ।
प्रकृतीनां स्वभावेन जायते तु गतायुषः ॥

SuSam ŚāSthā IV.78

The temperament of a man is never altered, nor does it suffer any deterioration or abatement. A change, abatement or deterioration in any particular case should be regarded as the harbinger of death. (Tr. K.L. Bhisagratna)

The **Suśruta Saṃhitā** describes each of the personality types and describes their character in terms of form, morality, behaviour pattern etc. and lists the animals which they resemble. This implies perhaps that animals also are personality types dominated by *doṣas*. The *doṣas* wind, fire and water function in the body, they move in the world and they have divine manifestations. The great elements are identical in the cosmos and in the person. Both the healthy maintenance of the body and disease are caused by food. The factors determining the utility of food are eight, the first of which is their innate attributes (*prakṛti*) such as lightness (*prakṛtilaghu*) and heaviness (*prakṛtiguru*). This means that *prakṛti* denotes the innate nature of the individual as well as the innate nature of the cosmos. This again shows the Indian inclination to classify humans, gods, plants, animals, the elements, etc. into one classificatory system.

Other systems of medicine, as reported in the **Suśruta Saṃhitā**, consider the personality types (*prakṛtis*) to have their origin in the material elements of the body (*mahābhūtas*), and classify them accordingly (*vātika prakṛti*, *taijasa prakṛti*, *āpya prakṛti*, *pārthiva prakṛti* and *nābhasa prakṛti*). In addition to the personality types of the three *doṣas* identified with wind, fire and water, personality types dominated by earth and space are added.

प्रकृतिमिह नराणां भौतिकीं केचिदाहुः ।

SuSam ŚāSthā IV.80a

Several other authorities hold that the temperaments of persons have their origin in the material elements of the body.

One of the uses of *prakṛti* in the **Maitrī Upaniṣad** is 'one's character' (2.6). Consciousness is described as the enjoyer and the body is like his chariot.

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The whip, which controls the horse, is made of one's character (*prakṛtimaya*). In the same Upaniṣad *prakṛti* also means matter. The relationship between consciousness (*puruṣa*) and matter (*prakṛti*) is explained as the enjoyer and the enjoyed.

पुरुषश्चेता प्रधानान्तःस्थः । स एव भोक्ता प्राकृतमन्नं भुङ्क्त इति ।...
भोक्ता पुरुषः । भोज्या प्रकृतिः । तत्स्थो भुङ्क्त इति । प्राकृतमन्नं त्रिगुणभेदपरिणामत्वान्महदाद्यं विशेषान्तं लिङ्गम् ।

MaitUp VI.10

The conscious person stands in the midst of matter. He is the enjoyer, for he enjoys the food of Nature.
The person is the enjoyer, and Nature is what is to be enjoyed. Being therein he enjoys. The food derived from Nature through the transformation in the partition of the three qualities becomes the subtle body, which includes from the intellect up to the separate elements. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The **Garbha Upaniṣad** (3) knows the distinction of Sāṃkhya between *aṣṭau prakṛtayaḥ* (the eight productive material causes) and *ṣoḍaśa vikārās* (the sixteen material products). The Vaiṣṇava **Rāmapūrvatāpani Upaniṣad** (26) says *prakṛti* is *īśvarī (prakṛtyā parameśvaryā)*. In the **Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad** *prakṛti* is a product of the spiritual principle (Śiva), the latter evolving into the former.

मायां तु प्रकृतिं विद्यान्मायिनं तु महेश्वरम् ।
तस्यावयवभूतैस्तु व्याप्तं सर्वमिदं जगत् ॥

ŚvUp IV.10

Know that nature is *māyā* and that the great god is the lord of *māyā*. The whole world is filled with beings who form his parts. (Tr. Tyagisananda)

In the Buddhist Tantra (Kālacakra), the eightfold nature of the body is mentioned where five elements are essential:

इह शरीरे आदावष्टविधा प्रकृतिः, पृथिव्यप्तेजोवाय्वाकाशमनोबुद्ध्यहङ्कारात्मिकाष्टविधेति, संसारचित्तस्य । ... त्रिविधा सत्त्वरजस्तमोभेदेन जाग्रत्-स्वप्न-सुषुप्त-धर्मिणी प्रकृतिः । ... अपरा चतुर्थी प्रकृतिः ज्ञानमूर्त्तिः ।

Vimalaprabhā on KālCaT II.86

The eightfold *prakṛti* abides in this body. These eight are characterized by the earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and ego.

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This is the realm of *citta*. With the distinction of three *guṇas* namely *sattva, rajas* and *tamas*, *prakṛti* is threefold having the characteristics of states namely waking, dream and slumber – the fourth *prakṛti* is of the form of knowledge. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

The twenty-four characteristics of *prakṛti* are also mentioned in the same text:

चतुर्विंशत्यात्मिका प्रकृतिः पुरुषस्य ग्राहकधर्मिणी ग्राह्यधर्मिणी प्रकृतिः । स्वाभाविका पुनर्ग्राह्यधर्मरहिताऽपरा प्रभास्वराऽस्तीति ।

Vimalaprabhā on KālCaT II.32

Prakṛti is of twenty-four characters. *Puruṣa* with the nature of subjectivity has *prakṛti* characterised by objectivity. But the innate nature of *prakṛti* is free from the attribute of objectivity – it is quite distinct from the previous one' (*aparā*) and is highly brilliant. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

In Jainism *prakṛti* is used to denote matter in the form of *karman. Karman* is material stuff (*pudgala*) that binds and produces changes in the soul. Walther Schübring (*The Doctrine of the Jainas*, p.173) explains that "by the merging with matter the beings are subjected to the *karman*. If they were not charged with *karman* the souls would lead that existence in the highest possible regions attributed to the *kevalin* after his parting from the world". Before it enters the soul the *karman* stuff is undifferentiated. Various natures or types (*prakṛti*) of *karman* are molded from this *karman* matter after interaction with the soul has begun. The specific nature (*prakṛti*) assumed by the previously undifferentiated matter is determined by the type of activity performed. The Jainas explain that bondage of the soul can be understood from four points of view:

प्रकृतिस्थित्यनुभावप्रदेशास्तद्विधयः ।

TaSū VIII.4

(There are four) kinds of that (bondage) according to nature (*prakṛti*) (of *karman* matter), duration (*sthiti*) (of the attachment of kārmic matter to the soul), the fruition (*anubhāva*) (being strong or mild), and the number (*pradeśa*) (of *karman* molecules which attach to the soul).

The nature of kārmic matter is first divided into eight kinds (*mūlaprakṛtis*) (knowledge obscuring, perception obscuring, energy obstructing, belief and conduct obstructing, duration of life determining, body type determining, family

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type determining, and pain and pleasure producing), and these eight kinds are subdivided into 148 main classes called the 148 *prakṛtis*. It has repeatedly been indicated that the details of these *prakṛtis* can be worked out to an infinite length, like a spiritual mathematics since every effect like an act, phenomenon, feeling, hope, disappointment, is a consequence of an action in the soul. *Prakṛti* here denotes the structure of the differentiated kārmic material stuff that holds the soul in bondage. The eight *prakṛtis* of Sāṃkhya and the *prakṛtis* of Jainism express the differentiation of a single substance (*mūlaprakṛti*, *pudgala*) as a result of the coming together of this substance with the self (*puruṣa*, *jīva*), whose true nature it covers.

According to the teaching of the science of politics of the **Artha-Śāstra**, the state (*rājya*) is constituted by seven elements (*prakṛtis* or *aṅgas*). The following seven are usually included:

स्वाम्यमात्यजनपददुर्गकोशदण्डमित्राणि प्रकृतयः ।

ArthŚ VI.1.1

The king, the minister, the country, the fortified city, the treasury, the army and the ally are the constituent elements (*prakṛtis*). (Tr. R.P. Kangle)

There is a tendency to believe that these elements are ordered hierarchically, the king being the highest, then the minister, etc., and that they possess productive force. The **Manu Smṛti** (IX.295) and Kauṭilya's **Artha-Śāstra** (VIII.1) note that "each earlier named is more important" and when calamities befall or any of the seven elements deteriorate, those that befall the preceding elements are more serious. The *prakṛtis* are also the generative causes of the kingdom without which the kingdom would not be, as the gold is the cause of the ear-ring. The kingdom arises and collapses according to the arising and dissolution of the creative principles (king, minister, army, etc.). Aparārka has explained the use of *prakṛti* in this context in the commentary on **Yājñavalkya Smṛti**:

यतः कार्यमुत्पद्यतेऽवतिष्ठते नियमेन भवति सा प्रकृतिः । यथा हिरण्यं कुण्डलस्य, राज्यं च विना स्वाम्यादिभिर्नोत्पद्यते । उत्पन्नमपि न तैर्विना चिरकालमनुवर्तते । ततो भवन्ति स्वाम्यादयो राज्याङ्गानि ।

Aparārka on YājSm I.353

From which the effect arises, it abides, necessarily, that is the material cause. In the same way as the gold of the ear-ring. And the kingdom arises not without the king etc., without them, it follows, the kingdom does not arise for a long time. Therefore, the king etc. are the parts of the kingdom.

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Prakṛti is also used in political theory to refer to the constituents of the circle of states (*maṇḍala*) in the theory of neighbouring states (Manu VII.156, ArthŚ VI.2). Friends and enemies, according to these texts, can be natural (*sahaja*), that is, based on kinship. Natural here means biological. They can be acquired (*kṛtrima*) because of wealth or they may be your friends because they are your enemy's enemy. This is according to the *maṇḍala* theory (*prākṛta*). *Prākṛta* here means he is a natural ally, a part of the *maṇḍala* theory of natural allies and enemies. Likewise, the immediate neighbour is a natural enemy (*prākṛta ari*). According to the **Agni Purāṇa** (233.21–22) and **Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa** (II.145.15–16) only two types of allies and enemies are distinguished, the kinship based (*sahaja*), and the acquired. The *prākṛta* friend and enemy, they say, are of the acquired kind. They thereby, perhaps, deny the naturalness of the *maṇḍala* theory. Kauṭilya considered the *maṇḍala* to consist of twelve elements (*prakṛtis*). He also refers to the number seventy-two of which twelve are the kings (*rājaprakṛti*) and sixty are sovereignty principles (*dravyaprakṛtis*). But there is no agreement among the authorities on the number of *prakṛtis* in the *maṇḍala*.

In the **Rāmāyaṇa**, *prakṛti* means sometimes the normal healthy condition.

ततः प्रकृतिमापन्नो हृतशल्यो गतक्लमः ।
सौमित्रिर्मुमुदे तत्र क्षणेन विगतज्वरः ॥

Rām VI.91.26

And restored to his natural condition, Sumitra's son, healed, and with his exhaustion removed, and his suffering gone off in a moment, experienced exhilaration of spirits.

Prakṛti is used in the **Rāmāyaṇa** also to denote the innate characteristics of the person.

एषा हि प्रकृतिः स्त्रीणामासृष्टे रघुनन्दन ।
समस्थमनुरज्यन्ते विषमस्थं त्यजन्ति च ॥

Rām III.13.5

Oh son of Raghu, this has been the nature of women from the commencement of creation, that they gladden him that is well off, and forsake a person in adversity.

The **Rasagaṅgādhara** distinguishes between three kinds of persons having three different kinds of innate natures:

प्रकृतयो दिव्या अदिव्या दिव्यादिव्याश्च । RasG LXIV.15

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There are three kinds of persons (*prakṛti*) (1) divine (heavenly), (2) nondivine (human), (3) mixed of both (divine and human nature).

Indra, Candragupta and Rāma are examples of the three types. *Sattva guṇa* dominates in the gods, while *rajas guṇa* dominates in humans.

One meaning of *prakṛti* in the **Mahābhārata** is the subjects of the king, the common people, as they are the constituents of society:

बालानपि च गर्भस्थान् सान्त्वानि समुदाचरन् ।
रञ्जयन्प्रकृतीः सर्वाः परिपाहि वसुन्धराम् ॥

MBh XII.34.32

Behaving with kindness towards even the children in the womb, make thy subjects glad and happy, and rule the Earth. (Tr. P.C. Roy)

The **Mahābhārata** gives the following synonyms of *prakṛti* as the unmanifest state of *triguṇa* which is the transcendent material productive force of the world.

तमोऽव्यक्तं शिवं नित्यमजं योनिः सनातनः ।
प्रकृतिर्विकारः प्रलयः प्रधानं प्रभवाप्ययौ ॥
अनुद्रिक्तमनूनं च ह्यकम्पमचलं ध्रुवम् ।
सदसच्चैव तत्सर्वमव्यक्तं त्रिगुणं स्मृतम् ।
ज्ञेयानि नामधेयानि नरैरध्यात्मचिन्तकैः ॥

MBh XIV.39.22–23

Darkness, unmanifest, auspicious, everlasting, unborn, source, eternal, producer, product, dissolution, the principal production and absorption, not developed, undiminished, unshaking, immovable, fixed, existent and also non-existent – all these unmanifest, (consisting) of the three constituents, are said to be. These names should be learnt by men who reflect upon matters relating to the self.

In the **Mahābhārata** *prakṛti* is used also as a name of the eight creative substances or principles (*aṣṭau prakṛtayaḥ*) of creation (*avyakta, buddhi, ahaṃkāra* and the *tanmātras* of space, wind, fire, water and earth), which are responsible for the manifestation of the world, of which the *avyakta, pradhāna*, or root *prakṛti* is the highest or first. The adherents of this teaching are the *prakṛtivādins.*

अव्यक्तमाहुः प्रकृतिं परां प्रकृतिवादिनः ।

MBh XII.294.27ab

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The adherents of *prakṛti* say the unmanifest (*avyakta*) is the highest *prakṛti*.

The eight *prakṛtis* likewise represent stages of meditative experience of *yoga* in which there is a movement from grosser levels to more subtle levels, lower levels to higher levels, manifest levels to unmanifest levels (MBh XII.238.3–4, XII.240.2).

Six uses of *prakṛti* in the **Bhagavad-Gītā** (MBh Bhīṣmaparvan 23–40) can be distinguished. First, *prakṛti* in the **Gītā** means 'original form' or 'normal'. In the famous theophany in chapter XII of the **Bhagavad-Gītā**, Viṣṇu showed Arjuna his transcendental forms. Arjuna having been overwhelmed and frightened asked Viṣṇu to show himself again in his gentle human form. Viṣṇu then appeared in the gentle form of Kṛṣṇa, and Arjuna's mind was restored to normal.

दृष्ट्वेदं मानुषं रूपं तव सौम्यं जनार्दन ।
इदानीमस्मि संवृत्तः सचेताः प्रकृतिं गतः ॥

BhG XI.51

Having seen your gentle human form, oh Janārdana, now I am fulfilled, with the mind restored to normal (*prakṛti*).

A second use in the **Gītā** is 'one's nature' which is identified as one's *saṃskāras* or *vāsanās*. These impressions are caused by the *dharma* and *adharma* acquired during past lives.

सदृशं चेष्टते स्वस्याः प्रकृतेर्ज्ञानवानपि ।
प्रकृतिं यान्ति भूतानि निग्रहः किं करिष्यति ॥

BhG III.33

Even the person who possesses knowledge behaves according to his own nature. Beings follow (their) nature. What can restraint accomplish?

Śaṅkara glosses this *prakṛti* with *pūrvakṛtadharmādharmādisaṃskārā vartamānajanmādāvabhivyaktāḥ* (impressions in the form of merit and demerit incurred in previous births manifest in the shape of the present birth, etc.) and Rāmānuja says this *prakṛti* means *anādikālapravṛttavāsanā* (the impressions operating from beginningless time).

These *saṃskāras* or *vāsanās*, which are caused by merit and demerit performed in earlier lives, cause rebirth in the form of beings who can possess divine or demonic nature (*prakṛti*).

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मोघाशा मोघकर्माणो मोघज्ञाना विचेतसः ।
राक्षसीमासुरीं चैव प्रकृतिं मोहिनीं श्रिताः ॥
महात्मानस्तु मां पार्थ दैवीं प्रकृतिमाश्रिताः ।
भजन्त्यनन्यमनसो ज्ञात्वा भूतादिमव्ययम् ॥

BhG IX.12–13

Those of vain hopes, vain actions, vain knowledge, deluded persons, abide in the deluded nature (*prakṛti=saṃskāras*) of Rākṣasas and Asuras. But those noble ones, Son of Pṛthā, abiding in divine nature (*prakṛti=saṃskāras*), worship me single-mindedly, knowing me as the imperishable origin of beings.

The distinction here is perhaps also between persons whose innate natures are dominated by *sattva guṇa* or by *tamas guṇa*. This second meaning is therefore closely related to the third use of *prakṛti* in the **Bhagavad-Gītā** as material nature constituted by the three *guṇas*.

प्रकृतेः क्रियमाणानि गुणैः कर्माणि सर्वशः ।
अहंकारविमूढात्मा कर्ताहमिति मन्यते ॥

BhG III.27

Activities are done entirely by the *guṇas* belonging to material nature (*prakṛti*). One deluded by egoity thinks: "I am the doer".

यदहंकारमाश्रित्य न योत्स्य इति मन्यसे ।
मिथ्यैष व्यवसायस्ते प्रकृतिस्त्वां नियोक्ष्यति ॥

BhG XVIII.59

If after having taken recourse to egoity you think "I shall not fight", (then) false is this determination of yours (because) nature will impel you.

Śaṅkara glosses this *prakṛti* with *kṣatriyasvabhāva*. *Prakṛti* predisposes persons to specific activity, the warrior to warlike behaviour etc., according to the dominance of the respective *guṇas* and *saṃskāras*. Everyone is forced to perform actions, even action which is against one's will, by the *guṇas* born from *prakṛti*. The fundamental message of the **Gītā** is that one should act in harmony with one's innate dispositions (*saṃskāras, guṇas*), but without egoistic attachment to the fruits of action, and be devoted to Kṛṣṇa.

प्रकृत्यैव च कर्माणि क्रियमाणानि सर्वशः ।
यः पश्यति तथात्मानमकर्तारं स पश्यति ॥

BhG XIII.29

And he who sees all actions performed exclusively by material nature, and thus sees himself as a non-doer, he truly sees.

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A fourth use of *prakṛti* in the **Gītā** is as something belonging to God. The **Bhagavad-Gītā** is among the early texts in which *prakṛti* is identified with *māyā* as the power of God.

अजोऽपि सन्नव्ययात्मा भूतानामीश्वरोऽपि सन् ।
प्रकृतिं स्वामधिष्ठाय सम्भवाम्यात्ममायया ॥

BhG IV.6

Although unborn, being imperishable, and also the lord of all beings, having taken recourse to my own material nature, I come into being by my own supernormal power.

सर्वभूतानि कौन्तेय प्रकृतिं यान्ति मामिकाम् ।
कल्पक्षये पुनस्तानि कल्पादौ विसृजाम्यहम् ॥

BhG IX.7

All beings go into my material nature, oh Son of Kuntī, at the end of a *kalpa*. At the beginning of a *kalpa* I send them forth.

Śaṅkara glosses this *prakṛti* with *mama vaiṣṇavīṃ māyāṃ triguṇātmikāṃ yasyā vaśe sarvamidam jagadvartate* (the *māyā* related to Viṣṇu, consisting of the three *guṇas* under the control of which this whole world exists). With the control of this *prakṛti* God becomes as if possessing a body (*dehavāniva*) and as if born (*jāta iva*), but not so in reality (*na paramārthataḥ*), since from the ultimate point of view no duality exists. Rāmānuja on the other hand glosses this *prakṛti* with *svabhāva (prakṛtiḥ svabhāvaḥ svaṇ eva svabhāvamadhiṣṭhāya svenaiva rūpeṇa svecchayā sambhavāmi)*, and understands *māyā* to mean knowledge (*jñāna*) and as identical with God's *jñānaśakti*. According to Deśika *svabhāva* means the body (*vigraha*), of God. This body of God is different from that *prakṛti* which is common to all and belongs to embodied beings (*saṃsārins*) because God controls his body. *Svabhāva* is a different principle than *prakṛti* understood as the *sattva, rajas* and *tamas* of Sāṃkhya and Yoga. God's body is not a product of *dharma* and *adharma*, and is therefore free from the *guṇas*: Nothing forces God to act. Madhva notes that this *prakṛti* is not independent (*svatantra*), but belongs to God, it is something he controls, like *dravya* and *karman*. Madhva agrees with Rāmānuja in the understanding of *māyā* as different from *prakṛti* and that it means knowledge.

Finally, there is in the **Gītā** a distinction between a lower and higher *prakṛti*. A fifth meaning of *prakṛti* is therefore the lower eightfold *prakṛti*, and a sixth meaning is the *aparā prakṛti*, which perhaps should be understood to refer to *kṣetrajña*.

भूमिरापोऽनलो वायुः खं मनो बुद्धिरेव च ।

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अहंकार इतीयं मे भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्टधा ॥
अपरेयमितस्त्वन्यां प्रकृतिं विद्धि मे पराम् ।
जीवभूतां महाबाहो ययेदं धार्यते जगत् ॥

BhG VII.4–5

Earth, water, fire, wind, space, mind, intellect and egoity, thus is this *prakṛti* of mine divided eightfold. Oh great armed one, know this other *prakṛti* of mine which is higher, which has become the *jīvas*, and by which the world is supported.

Śaṅkara identifies the lower *prakṛti* with the accepted eight *prakṛtis* of Sāṃkhya. This he does by identifying the five elements with the *tanmātras*, *manas* with *ahaṃkāra*, *buddhi* with material cause of *ahaṃkāra* and *ahaṃkāra* in the text with *avyakta*. This *prakṛti* he identifies with *māyā* and *śakti* (*prakṛtir me mama aiśvarī māyā śaktiraṣṭadhā bhinna bhedamāgatā*). These are the lower *prakṛtis*, he says, because they are instrumental for bondage. The higher *prakṛti* he identifies with *kṣetrajña* (*parāṃ prakṛṣṭāṃ jīvabhūtāṃ kṣetrajña lakṣaṇāṃ*). He defines this *prakṛti* as the instrument for maintaining life (*prāṇadhāraṇanimittabhūtāni*). Rāmānuja understands the lower *prakṛti* to include the elements, sense organs, *ahaṃkāra* and *buddhi*. This *prakṛti* he calls *vicitrapariṇāminī* (transforming into various forms) (on IX.8). The higher *prakṛti* are the conscious (*cetana*) *jīvas* who are the enjoyers (*bhoktṛ*) of the lower *prakṛti* which is the enjoyed (*bhogya*). Madhva says that there are two *prakṛtis* of God, the sentient and insentient *prakṛti*. The lower *prakṛti*, he says, is insentient (*jaḍa*), and the higher *prakṛti* is sentient (*ajaḍa*). Madhva understands the lower *prakṛti* to be the insentient *avyakta prakṛti* and the higher *prakṛti* to be the goddess Śrī, god's wife, who maintains (*dhāryate*) the lower *prakṛti*.

Prakṛti in the *Sāṃkhya* and *Yoga* systems of religious thought is the subtle material power within phenomena which produces their manifest form. *Prakṛti* is the producer, the *natura naturans*, the productive aspect of nature, the inner principle which causes things into being. *Prakṛti* expresses the unity and interdependence of the worlds of gross and subtle matter. It denotes the innate nature of living beings, the world's innate nature, and the material world in its totality. It therefore expresses the correlation of the micro and macro-cosmos. It is the creative material stuff of the world, the generative principle, that from which the world is produced and that into which it will dissolve, in the eternal rhythm of death and rebirth, withdrawal and manifestation. S.N. Dasgupta has argued with respect to *prakṛti* in Sāṃkhya and Yoga that *prakṛti* and all its emanations or modifications are of the nature of substantive entities as well as of power or force. "Their appearance as substantive entities and their appearance as power

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or force are but two aspects, and so it will be erroneous to make any real distinction between the substantive entity and its power or force" (*Yoga Philosophy in Relation to Other Systems of Indian Thought*, p.119). *Prakṛti* is dynamic and self propelled, it is independent (*svatantra*), and movement is inherent in it. It is like an organic whole that works from within, it functions by its own inherent capacity (*svabhāva*). Unmanifest materiality (*prakṛti*) is, like the souls (*puruṣa*), an unmanifest (*avyakta*) transcendent principle. Unmanifest materiality, although imperceptible, contains all the universe in an undifferentiated state, while the souls, on the contrary, are, by their very nature, contentless. Transcendent materiality has immense creative power (*śaktitva, vibhutva*). It is the *sargapralayadharmin*, the substratum of the manifestation and dissolution of the world.

The Greek *physis*, to which the Sāṃkhya *prakṛti* can be compared, originally meant the internal source of a thing's behaviour, the thing in it that made it behave as it did. That word was then applied to the universal primitive substance postulated by the Pre-Socratic philosophers. *Physis* and *prakṛti* both refer to the first material cause of the universe and both terms reflect the interest in understanding the material causes, perhaps in contrast to the belief in arbitrary control by gods, or by priests through the sacrifice. While some of the Pre-Socratic philosophers tried to identify this material cause with different natural elements such as water or fire, *prakṛti*, for the Sāṃkhya and Yoga thinkers, was undifferentiated non specific matter with transcendent qualities. The natural elements were, for Sāṃkhya and Yoga, conceived as products of this transcendent materiality.

Sāṃkhya and Yoga are soteriological systems of religious thought (*mokṣaśāstra*), and their understanding of matter is based on the experience of the liberation of the soul (*puruṣa*). Matter can be used for many purposes, but speculations of the Sāṃkhya and Yoga schools are concerned with the knowledge and use of matter for the purpose of the liberation of the soul. This does not mean that materiality is useful only for that single purpose. Most living beings use matter for enjoyment (*bhoga*), and matter functions in this way for most living beings. Matter, in other words, is usable both for the purpose of leaving the world and for enjoying the world. Most areas of human knowledge are about the enjoyment of the world (*bhogaśāstra*), while the knowledge of Sāṃkhya and Yoga is for the sake of leaving it. The analysis of *prakṛti* in the Sāṃkhya and Yoga texts does supply knowledge about matter, therefore, mainly in the form of matter being a soteriological instrument. That does not mean that matter is only that, and that all other descriptions of the world are wrong, it means that the world can be known and used in different ways. According to Sāṃkhya and Yoga knowing can be principally of only two types: *apavarga* (liberation) and

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bhoga (enjoyment). *Prakṛti* in Sāṃkhya and Yoga view is therefore not primarily a cosmogonical concept but an analysis of matter for the purpose of liberation and is based on the soteriological experience itself.

The question who breaks the equilibrium of the *guṇas* in its unmanifest stage (*sarūpapariṇāma*) so that manifestations appear (*virūpapariṇāma*) is not a very important question for Sāṃkhya and Yoga. This is because *avidyā* and *karman*, and therefore also bondage, are beginningless. The Sāṃkhya and Yoga sage Pañcaśikha, quoted in the **Vyāsa Bhāṣya** on **Yoga-Sūtra** II.22, said: *dharmiṇāmanādisaṃyogād dharmamātrāṇām apyanādiḥ saṃyoga iti.* A second reason is that the equilibrium stage of *prakṛti* is not a state of absolute motionlessness, but, on the contrary, a state of movement and mutation. *Prakṛti* is a mutating absolute principle. Movement is inherent in it, and no agent is necessary at any stage to move it.

The activity of *prakṛti* is in two stages, as *sarūpapariṇāma* and as *virūpapariṇāma.* In *sarūpapariṇāma* the same thing appears and there is no loss of equilibrium. In *virūpapariṇāma* new things appear. *Virūpapariṇāma* are of four kinds. In *tattvapariṇāma* there is production of new *tattvas.* In *dharmapariṇāma* there is change of appearance. Appearance has three stages: the unmanifest which exists in the future, the manifest moment of the present, and the past when it has been manifested. *Lakṣaṇapariṇāma* is the mental mutation which records the history of the thing in the future, present and the past. *Avasthāpariṇāma* is the change a thing undergoes, like growth and decay of the body that effect the constitution of a thing.

This first material cause, *mūlaprakṛti*, can be known by inference. The proof for the existence of *prakṛti* is given in the **Sāṃkhya-Kārikā**:

भेदानां परिमाणात् समन्वयात् शक्तितः प्रवृत्तेश्च ।
कारणकार्यविभागादविभागाद्वैश्वरूप्यस्य ॥
कारणमस्त्यव्यक्तं प्रवर्तते त्रिगुणतः समुदयाच्च ।
परिणामतः सलिलवत् प्रतिप्रतिगुणाश्रयविशेषात् ॥

SāṃKā 14–15

(a) Because of the finiteness of specific things in the world which require a cause; (b) because of homogeneity or sameness of the finite world; (c) because of the power of potency (of the cause) which the process of emergence or evolution implies; (d) because of separation or distinction between cause and its effect (with respect to modification or appearance); (e) because of the undividedness or uniformity of the entire world; the unmanifest (*avyakta*) is the cause; it functions because of or by the interaction of the three *guṇas*, modified

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like water, due to the specific nature abiding in the respective *guṇas.* (Tr. G.J. Larson)

Materiality exists in a manifest (*vyakta*) and unmanifest (*avyakta*) state. Unmanifest materiality is the *mūla prakṛti* or primordial materiality, manifest materiality is the product of the unmanifest. Knowing the difference between the manifest, the unmanifest and the soul (*vyaktāvyaktajñavijñāna*) is the means to salvation.

हेतुमदनित्यमव्यापि सक्रियमनेकमाश्रितं लिङ्गम् ।
सावयवं परतन्त्रं व्यक्तं विपरीतमव्यक्तम् ॥
त्रिगुणमविवेकि विषयः सामान्यमचेतनं प्रसवधर्मि ।
व्यक्तं तथा प्रधानं तद्विपरीतस्तथा च पुमान् ॥

SāṃKā 10–11

The manifest is caused; finite; non-pervasive; active; plural; supported; mergent; composite; dependent; the unmanifest is the opposite. (Both) the manifest and the unmanifest are (characterized by the) three *guṇas* ('constituents' or 'strands'); undiscriminated; objective; general; nonconscious; productive; the *puruṣa* is the opposite of them, although similar. (Tr. G.J Larson)

Similar means that *puruṣa* shares some of the characteristics of *avyakta*, but not all characteristics. *Puruṣa* is similar to the unmanifest in some respects, but totally different from the unmanifest in other respects. For example, both *puruṣa* and *avyakta* are eternal, but *avyakta* is always mutating while *puruṣa* is immutable.

According to Sāṃkhya, unmanifest matter is *prakṛti*, the other seven productive principles are *prakṛtivikṛtis.*

मूलप्रकृतिरविकृतिर्महदाद्याः प्रकृतिविकृतयः सप्त ।
षोडशकस्तु विकारो न प्रकृतिर्न विकृतिः पुरुषः ॥

SāṃKā 3

Primordial nature is uncreated. The seven – the great one, etc. – are both created and creative. The sixteen are created. *Puruṣa* is neither created nor creative. (Tr. G.J. Larson)

Prakṛti, when associated with *puruṣa*, produces the first product, intellect (*buddhi*), from which egoity (*ahaṃkāra*) is produced. The five subtle elements, which produce the five gross elements, are products from the tāmasic *ahaṃkāra*, while the eleven sense capacities are products of sāttvic *ahaṃkāra.* Other schools

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like Kashmir Śaivism, the Śakti Tāntrism of Śrī Vidyā, Śaiva Siddhānta etc. have expanded on the Sāṃkhya scheme of producers and products by adding additional *tattvas* above the twenty-fourth (*prakṛti*) and the twenty-fifth (*puruṣa*) principle, because of a necessity in these systems, perhaps to explain the creation of the world, the concealing of the divine, and the relation of the individual and the world to a supreme godhead representing the transcendent unity of materiality and consciousness, without denying the reality of the world. The additional *tattvas* reflect the religious practice of these systems. It also reflects the influence of the theory of materiality of Sāṃkhya and Yoga on the religious movements. S.N. Dasgupta observed that there have been principally three orders of materialists in India, the Sāṃkhya, the Vaiśeṣika, and the Buddhists, but that every system of thought in later days which conceded any reality to the external world borrowed from the Sāṃkhya their *prakṛti*, *buddhi*, *ahaṃkāra*, *tanmātras* with such modifications that suited them.

The twenty-five *tattvas* of Sāṃkhya are:

consciousness (*puruṣa*)/materiality (*prakṛti*)
intellect (*buddhi*)
egoity (*ahaṃkāra*)
mind (*manas*)

hearing	speaking	sound	space
touching	grasping	touch	wind
seeing	walking	form	fire
tasting	procreating	taste	water
smelling	excreting	smell	earth

The *liṅga* or transmigrating body consists of the subtle material stuff, which excludes, among the *tattvas*, only the gross elements. When the embodied person dies, the gross body returns to the respective gross elements, while the subtle body becomes reborn in a new body according to its predispositions (*bhāvas*). *Prakṛti* here is that which together with the soul (*puruṣa*) constitutes the embodied person.

The intellect (*buddhi*) is endowed with eight predispositions (*bhāva*), and seven of these (*dharma, adharma, ajñāna, virāga, rāga, aiśvarya, anaiśvarya*) determine further rebirths, and are therefore said to bind *prakṛti.*

रूपैः सप्तभिरेव तु बध्नात्यात्मानमात्मनाप्रकृतिः ।

SāṃKā 63ab

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Prakṛti binds herself by herself by means of seven forms (rūpa or bhāva). (Tr. G.J. Larson)

The eighth, *jñāna*, leads to liberation. *Virāga* or complete detachment without the liberating knowledge of the difference of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, leads to merging with *prakṛti* (*vairāgyāt prakṛtilaya*), that is, bondage to the transcendent subtle form of materiality; and when there is a new world creation such a being arises again as all-knowing and all doer (*sarvavit sarvakartā*).

Unmanifest materiality exists independently but the manifestations are for the sake of enjoyment and liberation of the soul (*puruṣavimokṣanimitta*). Sāṃkhya and Yoga considered *prakṛti* as the only active agent, while the souls were totally passive. In Sāṃkhya and Yoga matter therefore both binds and saves the souls. *Prakṛti* is both the liberator and that from which one is liberated. The discriminative enlightenment (*vivekakhyāti*) is a product of *prakṛti* because the means to liberation is a thing produced from *prakṛti*. Materiality has a soteriological function. *Prakṛti* is helper or assistant (*upakārinī*), who brings salvation to the souls, or a shy dancer (*nartakī*) who withdraws when she has been seen by the audience. *Prakṛti* of Sāṃkhya and Yoga is conceived in a series of beautiful images:

प्रकृतेः सुकुमारतरं न किञ्चिदस्तीति मे मतिर्भवति ।

SāṃKā 61ab

It is my thought that there is nothing more delicate than *prakṛti*. (Tr. G.J. Larson)

वत्सविवृद्धिनिमित्तं क्षीरस्य यथा प्रवृत्तिरज्ञस्य ।
पुरुषविमोक्षनिमित्तं तथा प्रवृत्तिः प्रधानस्य ॥

SāṃKā 57

As the unknowing (or unconscious) milk functions for the sake of the nourishment of the calf so the *prakṛti* functions for the sake of the release of the *puruṣa*. (Tr. G.J. Larson)

One who falsely identifies his self with *prakṛti* is bound to rebirth, and the realization of the separateness of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* causes deliverance. Matter is therefore an ambivalent power, it is pain and pleasure, darkness and luminosity, it binds but it also liberates.

The Sāṃkhya and Yoga analysis of the dualism between the self and the material universe, and the distinction between subtle and gross matter, etc. were used to systematize the cosmogonies and cosmologies of the mythological tradition. The relationship between Sāṃkhya speculations and the Purāṇic

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texts has been summed up by Larson, who thinks the proto-Sāṃkhya speculation "functions more as a heuristic cluster of symbols, utilized for purposes of cosmogony, mythology, and religious devotion. It represents an interesting illustration of the manner in which philosophical notions came to be assimilated and popularized in a broader cultural environment" (*Classical Sāṃkhya*, p.291).

According to the **Śiva Purāṇa**, *prakṛti* is the body of God, while God is the agent who disturbs the equilibrium of the three *guṇas* of *prakṛti*.

नमः प्रधानदेहाय प्रधानक्षोभकारिणे ।

ŚPur VII.1.2.19ab

Homage to him whose body is *pradhāna* and who is the agent of the disturbance of the *pradhāna* (equilibrium of the three *guṇas*).

God is the superintendent of matter which is dependent on him. According to Rāmānuja *prakṛti* in its fine essence forms the body of *īśvara*, and the world is a transformation of the body of *īśvara*. The material nature is here dependent on and controlled by the God, the male deity. Also in the **Viṣṇu Purāṇa**, *prakṛti*, controlled by Viṣṇu, is the cause of all beings.

हेतुभूतमशेषस्य प्रकृतिः सा परा मुने ॥

ViPur II.7.27cd

The supreme *prakṛti* is the cause of all without any exception, oh Muni!

In the Purāṇas some emphasis is on the cosmic nature and the cosmogonical function of *prakṛti*. The unmanifest *prakṛti* is the equilibrium of the three *guṇas* *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. This is the most subtle material substance. The three *guṇas* are always mutating, even when in equilibrium. In the presence of *puruṣa* the equilibrium is disturbed and the process of world manifestation begins.

सत्त्वं रजस्तमश्चैव गुणत्रयमुदाहृतम् ।
साम्यावस्थितिरेतेषां प्रकृतिः परिकीर्तिता ॥
केचित्प्रधानमित्याहुरव्यक्तमपरे जगुः ।
एतदेवप्रजासृष्टिं करोति विकरोति च ॥

MatPur III.14–15

There are three *guṇas* or qualities known as *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The state of equilibrium of these three is called *prakṛti* or primordial matter. Some call it *pradhāna*, others *avyakta*, and this is what causes the creation and destruction of the universe.

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In the **Viṣṇu Purāṇa** (I.2.19–20) *prakṛti* is described as subtle (*sūkṣma*), eternal (*nitya*), comprehending causes and effects (*sadasadātmaka*), durable (*akṣayya*), self-sustained (*nānyadādhāra*), immeasurable (*ameya*), undecaying (*ajara*), stable (*dhruva*), devoid of sound, touch, colour and form, the three constituents (*triguṇa*), the source of the world (*jagadyoni*), without beginning (*anādi*), and production and absorption (*prabhavāpyaya*). *Prakṛti* is, in the **Viṣṇu Purāṇa**, also described as the cause of the cosmos in the form of the elements (the eight *prakṛtis*) of Sāṃkhya, in the elemental creation, but also in the form of thousand of millions of cosmic eggs. Each world is encompassed by the shell of the egg of Brahmā. Outside the shell is water, the water is encompassed by fire, fire by air, air by mind (*manas*), mind by egoity (*ahaṃkāra*), egoity by intellect (*buddhi*), intellect by root materiality (*prakṛti*). Here the mental capacities are typically conceived as material elements, analogous to earth, water, fire, air or space, but of a more subtle kind. Each of these extends ten times the breadth of that which it encloses. When the universe is dissolved, water swallows up smell, the *tanmātra* of earth, fire licks up taste, the water *tanmātra*, air consumes form, the *tanmātra* of fire, space destroys thermal impression, the *tanmātra* of air, egoism consumes sound, the *tanmātra* of space, egoity is swallowed by *mahat*, the great one. "Earth and *Mahat* are the inner and outer boundaries of the universe." Creation means emanation from high to low, subtle to gross, unmanifest to manifest, and *prakṛti* is that highest, most subtle material principle, the unmanifest imperceptible transcendental primary matter from which the material universe is produced.

Prakṛti expresses the organic metaphor of creation. It is sometimes a symbol of, and perhaps an attempt to conceptualize on an abstract level, the processes in nature of growth and decay, birth and death, night and day, the seasonal change of vegetation. The cosmic processes are wave like movements of cosmic matter. Since decay is the nature of things, manifestation ends in a cosmic dissolution (*pralaya*) in *mūlaprakṛti*, from which creation is again sent forth.

चतुर्युगसहस्रान्ते प्राकृतः प्रकृतौ लयः ।

AgPur 368.2ab

The dissolution called *prākṛta* means dissolution in the *prakṛti*. It happens at the end of one thousand *caturyugas* (the four *yugas* are Satya, Tretā, Dvāpara, and Kali).

According to the **Viṣṇu Purāṇa**, there are four kinds of *pralayas*. *Naimittika pralaya* takes place when Brahmā sleeps, *prākṛta pralaya* occurs when the universe merges into *prakṛti*, *ātyantika pralaya* is the result of knowledge of God, and *nitya pralaya* is the continual destruction that takes place daily. When

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a universe dissolve, all embodied beings (*devatiryañmanuṣyasthāvara*) of that universe dissolve into *prakṛti*. Even Hiraṇyagarbha or Brahmā at the time of *pralaya* loses his body and gains a new one at the time of a new creation (VāPur IV.68).

Prakṛti is used in a poetic statement in Kālidāsa's **Raghuvaṃśa** to suggest that, since death is the nature of sentient beings, we should celebrate every moment of being alive. Life is a deviation (*vikṛti*) from the state of death. The words are spoken to King Aja who is suffering from the death of his beloved wife Indumatī, for the sake of comforting him.

मरणं प्रकृतिः शरीरिणां विकृतिर्जीवितमुच्यते बुधैः ।
क्षणमप्यवतिष्ठते श्वसन्यदि जन्तुर्ननु लाभवानसौ ॥

Ragh VIII.87

Wise men say that death is but the nature of the sentient beings, and life is a mere deviation from that natural state. If a creature remains breathing even for a moment, he is assuredly a gainer. (Tr. G.R. Nandargikar)

In Bhartṛhari's (450–510 A.D.) **Vākyapadīya**, *prakṛti* means the material cause.

विकारापगमे सत्यां सुवर्णं कुण्डले यथा ।
विकारापगमे सत्यां तथाऽहुः प्रकृतिं पराम् ॥

Vāk III.2.15

Just as, when forms disappear, it is the gold which is the truth in the earring etc., in the same way, when transformations (like earth etc.) disappear, the primordial substance (*prakṛti*) is the only thing which is real. (Tr. K.A.S. Iyer)

The view of Gauḍapāda is different. The **Gauḍapāda-Kārikā** argues that there can be no change in nature whatsoever (*prakṛteranyathābhāvo*) (III.21;IV.7;IV.29), and that all *dharmas* are by their very nature (*prakṛtyā*) unoriginated (*anutpanna*) and completely unmodified (*sunirvṛta*) (IV.93):

न भवत्यमृतं मर्त्यं न मर्त्यममृतं तथा ।
प्रकृतेरन्यथाभावो न कथंचिद्भविष्यति ॥

GauKā III.21 and IV.7

The immortal does not become mortal, and likewise the mortal does not become immortal. There can be no change in nature (*prakṛti*) in any way whatever.

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According to a different understanding of *prakṛti*, *prakṛti* is like a consort being fertilized by the energies of the male god.

अव्यक्तमखिलस्यास्य जगतो जन्मकारणम् ॥
संक्षोभ्य शक्तिकिरणैर्व्यक्तिं नयति तत्क्षणात् ।
व्यक्तस्य वृत्तयस्तिस्रो विततास् सर्वगोचराः ॥

MPĀ vp XV.3cd–4

The cause of the entire universe is the unmanifest *prakṛti*. By means of radiant rays of his *śakti* he causes disturbance in this unmanifest one and brings about manifestation in it immediately. The manifest form of *prakṛti* has three modifications (*vṛttayaḥ*). They permeate everything and are enjoyed by everybody. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

According to the **Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā** *prakṛti* is a power (*śakti*) of God, by which he has originated the world.

जगत्प्रकृतिभावो यः सा शक्तिः परिकीर्तिता ॥

AhSam II.57cd

That which is the material cause of the world, that is called *śakti*.

... परमा प्रकृतिश्च सा
शक्तिर्या व्यापिनो विष्णोः सा जगत्प्रकृतिः परा ॥

AhSam V.28bcd

That supreme *prakṛti* is the power of the all pervading Viṣṇu. She is the primordial source of the universe. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

In the goddess cults manifested in texts such as the **Durgā Saptaśatī** and **Lakṣmī Tantra** the goddess is the primordial matter (*prakṛti*) that evolves into creation, but she also transcends matter.

प्रकृतिस्त्वं च सर्वस्य गुणत्रयविभाविनी ।

DuSapta I.59ab

You are the primordial material (*prakṛti*) of everything, manifesting the triad of constituent strands. (Tr. T.B. Coburn)

मत्तः प्रक्रियते विश्वं प्रकृतिः सास्मि कीर्तिता ।

LT IV.51ab

The universe is produced from me (as a 'mode' of myself), hence I am called *prakṛti*. (Tr. Sanjukta Gupta)

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In the systems of Kashmir Śaivism *prakṛti* is the 24th of total 36 principles. According to these systems *śakti*, *māyā*, and *prakṛti* become manifested in a hierarchical order. The 36th principle is Śiva, the 35th to 32nd principles are dominated by Śakti, the divine energy, which polarizes reality into subject and object. The 31st to 26th principles are dominated by Māyā which conceals the divine nature. While these principles belong to the cosmos, the 25th principle *puruṣa* is the individual subject and the 24th, *prakṛti*, is the foundation of the objective experience (*bhogyā*) of the individual. From the 23rd to the final earth principle are similiar to the Sāṃkhya and Yoga principles. This process of manifestation is caused, according to Abhinavagupta, by the free will of Śiva, who is both the material and instrumental cause of the world.

न वैषम्यमनापन्नं कारणं कार्यसूतये ॥
गुणसाम्यात्मिका तेन प्रकृतिः कारणं भवेत् ।

TĀl VIII.254cd–255ab

No cause without losing its balance is able to bring about its result. Therefore *prakṛti* with the characteristic of equivalence of *guṇas* should be the cause (of intellect). (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

अस्माकं तु स्वतन्त्रेश तथेच्छाक्षोभसंगतम् ॥
अव्यक्तं बुद्धितत्त्वस्य कारणं क्षोभिता गुणाः ।

TĀl VIII.257cd–258ab

According to our system (Kashmir Śaivism) by the free will of the Lord *avyakta*, the unmanifest *prakṛti*, being agitated, the *guṇas* are agitated, and then they become the cause of the principle called *buddhi*. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

The *Śākta* perspective, by personifying *prakṛti*, rejects the Sāṃkhya view of unconscious (*acetana*) matter. With *prakṛti* becoming a goddess, or identified with the Goddess, Devī, the old Sāṃkhya dualism between passive consciousness and active materiality was rejected. By personifying *prakṛti*, consciousness is automatically ascribed to it, and consciousness and materiality merge into a monistic concept. According to the Sāṃkhya view, all beings, including gods and goddesses, are mixtures of both *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. The disagreement is about what comes first, two principles which combined into a unity, or one principle which divided itself into a bipolar reality. The Devī combines the ideals of the dispassionate witness of *puruṣa* and the compassionate mother of *prakṛti*.

सांख्या वदन्ति पुरुषं प्रकृतिं च यां तां
चैतन्यभावरहितां जगतश्च कर्त्रीम् ।

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Figure 1: Ambikā: Jaina, 12th Cent. A.D., Rajasthan

किं तादृशाऽसि कथमत्र जगन्निवास-
श्चैतन्यताविरहितो विहितस्त्वयाऽद्य ॥

DBhāgPur I.7.29

The Sāṃkhya philosophers say that of the two principles, *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*, it is *Prakṛti*, the creatrix of the world, that is devoid of consciousness *(caitanya)*. But can you (Devī, identified with *prakṛti*) be of such nature, for (if this were so), how could the abode of the world (Viṣṇu) be made unconscious by you today? (Tr. C. Mackenzie Brown)

With *prakṛti* personified as a goddess she is prayed to as a divine power.

नमः प्रकृत्यै भद्रायै नियताः प्रणताः स्म ताम् ॥

DuSapta V.7cd

Hail to *Prakṛti*, the auspicious! We who are restrained bow down to her. (Tr. T.B. Coburn)

The Tāntric text **Prapañcasāra** contains a hymn of twenty verses (XI.49–68) to the goddess who is the world but also transcends it as the uncreated

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changeless one. In a part of the hymn, each of the *tattvas* of the Sāṃkhya *prakṛti* are prayed to.

नमः शब्दरूपे नमो व्योमरूपे
नमः स्पर्शरूपे नमो वायुरूपे ।
नमो रूपतेजोरसाम्भःस्वरूपे
नमस्तेऽस्तु गन्धात्मिके भूस्वरूपे ॥
नमः श्रोत्रचर्माक्षिजिह्वाख्यनासा-
स्यवाक्पाणिपत्पायुसोपस्थरूपे ।
मनोबुद्ध्यहंकारचित्तस्वरूपे
विरूपे नमस्ते विभो विश्वरूपे ॥

PSāT XI.53–54

Homage to you in the form of sound and space,
Homage to you in the form of touch and wind,
Homage to you whose own form is form and light, taste and water,
Homage be to you in your own form as smell and earth,
Homage to you in the form of ear, skin, eye, tongue and nose, speech, hand, foot, organ of excretion and generation, *manas*, *buddhi, ahaṃkāra, citta*,
Homage to you, the all pervading one, who is the universe and formless.

The creation myth in which creation takes place after the first being has transformed himself into a male-female pair, and thereafter into the male-female pair of different species such as cow/bull/mare/stallion, she-ass/he-ass, she-goat/he-goat, etc. first described in the **Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad**, is found subsequently in many texts. In the later texts the female is called *prakṛti*. The **Liṅga Purāṇa** V.28–33 says that in the beginning of the creation Brahmā had created a Being posessed of a body half man's and half woman's. Then the creator said: Divide yourself. By dividing himself in two, a female was born. The texts says that all the women in the three worlds are born of the female part. Everything feminine in gender is she herself. This theme is developed further in texts devoted to the goddess and in these texts also, the female divine beings as well as female human beings are identified with a principle called *prakṛti*, which, in these texts, is a term for what can, perhaps, be called "the female principle".

In the **Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa** (1100–1700 A.D.) and the **Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa** (1400–1600 A.D.), *prakṛti* is a name of a divine feminine principle, a goddess. At the beginning of creation the *Paramātman* divided himself into a male and female half. His left side was the female *prakṛti*. This

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Figure 2: Skandamātā, The Divine Mother: from Tanesara-Mahādeva, 6th-7th Cent. A.D.

primal goddess called *Prakṛti* divided herself into five forms. In the *Prakṛti Khaṇḍa* (I.51–60) of **Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa** and the ninth book of **Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa** (IX.1.1.), it is said that the entire *Prakṛti* consists of five parts. The five manifestations of her are the goddesses Rādhā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Sāvitrī and Durgā. These goddesses are called the five highest *prakṛtis*. Ṣaṣṭhī Devī is later said to be a sixth part of *prakṛti* (IX.1.71–95). The goddesses Gaṅgā, Tulasī Devī, Manasā, Maṅgala Caṇḍikā, etc. are said to be both part of the five highest *prakṛtis* and the *mūlaprakṛti*. The modifications of *prakṛti* in these texts are female deities. Also women in general are said to be incarnations of *prakṛti* since *prakṛti* descends to the world in the form of women. All the goddesses and all women are part of the goddess *prakṛti*. The descriptions of *prakṛti* in these texts are descriptions of goddesses and women.

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Manifestation in the Arts

Prakṛti is the producer of the material elements whose transformations constitute art and also art-experience. One mode of participation in the transformations of matter is through the artistic creative process. Since the material effects pre-exist in the material cause (*satkārya*), humans create nothing new but only bring to manifestation that which exists already in the unmanifest state in the material cause. The creative process corresponds to the cosmogonical process and signifies the making manifest of the pre-existent and never the creation of something totally new. Humans thus participate in causing the unmanifest to become manifest.

While the creative process moves from the less differentiated to the more differentiated, from unity to multiplicity, the goal of aesthetic experience is to move in the opposite direction, from multiplicity to unity, from the more differentiated to the less differentiated, from the tāmasic dominated state of matter towards the sāttvic dominated state of matter. Art thus provides the means to get close to the undifferentiated source of materiality. This process of aesthetic enjoyment is therefore analogous to the yogic process of withdrawal of the senses from the manifoldness of experience towards singleness of concentration. The experience of *rasa* is analogous to the yogic experience of *samādhi*. The pure sāttvic experience of the *buddhi* in *samādhi* transcends the principle of egoity and, as such, corresponds to the culmination of the aesthetic experience, which is the enjoyment of *rasa*, the universalized emotive states. The highest *rasa, śāntarasa*, is also the *rasa* most analogous to the peace of spiritual liberation. Both *rasa* and *samādhi* are the result of a process of becoming universal, and their similarity points to a similar understanding of the structure of matter, and thus to the material reality itself. *Prakṛti* provides, when correctly understood, and when the right method is used, opportunity for both the experience of *rasa* and *samādhi*.

The symbolism of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* as cosmological principles is used extensively in Hindu art, especially in temple building. The **Agni Purāṇa** (61.19) suggests that the flags of the temple are constituted by two parts, the streamer and the rod. The streamer is *prakṛti*, the rod is *puruṣa*. They are perhaps identified with *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* because the streamer is agitated by the wind, while the rod is always immovable like *puruṣa*. The main sanctum (*vimāna*) of the temple is called *puruṣa* while the front hall of the temple is called *prakṛti*. The base or original ground of the temple building is also called *prakṛti*, it is the basis from which the temple arises and on which the temple stands.

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उन्नतां प्रकृतिं भूमिं कृत्वा हस्त प्रमाणतः ।
घनीकृत्य तद्ऊर्ध्वस्थमुपानं जन्म चोच्यते ॥

Mayam XIV.9

The regulating course (*upāna*) called 'origin' (*janman*) should be laid down after the original ground (*prakṛtiṃ bhūmiṃ*) has been raised one cubit and has been rendered compact. (Tr. B. Dagens)

Prakṛti is identified with the female half of the Ardhanārīśvara sculptures, which represents materiality, and the power (*śakti*) of manifestation of the male god. *Prakṛti* is likewise identified with the sculptures of the female consort of Viṣṇu and his *avatāras* such as Lakṣmī, Sītā and Rādhā. According to Sāṃkhya the two principles of materiality and consciousness preceded the manifestation of the gods, humans etc., who are products of the coming together of these two principles, and therefore men and women alike are mixtures of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. In Tāntrism and Śāktism, however, *prakṛti* often means the female principle which produces the goddesses and also women in general. The temple image of Pārvatī as mother with child, describes the *prakṛti* or female aspect of Pārvatī, the ability to give birth to the universe. In the myth of the birth of Gaṇeśa, it is told that Pārvatī produced him from the rubbings of her skin. This likewise symbolizes the self-creative power of *prakṛti*. In the Dakṣiṇāmūrti figure in the Elora Cave the vertical axis of the figure is understood to be consciousness, fire, the light of heaven, the absolute *puruṣa*. The horizontal axis stands for the reflection of fire or light in the waters, the sea of potentiality, *prakṛti* from which the world emerges. The coming together of consciousness and materiality represents the coming together of spirit and matter which underlies all existence.

Prakṛti is conceived as a tree producing seeds. As a tree, consisting of root, stem, and branches, springs from a seed and produces other seeds, from which grow other trees, so from *prakṛti* springs *buddhi*, the gross elements, humans, animals and gods etc. *Prakṛti* produces innumerable forms without being diminished. In the **Mahābhārata** XIV.12–15, in another metaphor, it is said that *buddhi* is the trunk, the gross elements its branches, its inward channels the sense-capacities, and the leaves the sense objects. The seed grows with the roots in heaven, and *prakṛti* is like the Aśvattha tree with the root above and the branches stretching forth below (*ūrdhvamūlam adhaḥśākham*).

Prakṛti, meaning the creative principle of nature, is sometimes identified with vegetation. In the description of the rite of consecration of the doors of the temple in the **Agni Purāṇa** (C.4–5), it is said, according to some interpretations, that one should locate *prakṛti*, the primal creative material principle, by repeating the *praṇava mantra* (*Om*), in the ornamental globe over its pinnacle.

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Figure 3: *Kalpadruma*, wishfulfilling tree: Besnagar, 2nd Cent. B.C., Calcutta Museum

The ornamental globe or the arch of the *gavākṣa*, the symbolic windows of the temple, was originally a gable window and it got its form from two branches being fixed at the bottom and their tops tied together. It has retained as its outline the shape of this arch of vegetation, often decorated with a vegetation creeper curving upwards in the arch. Stella Kramrisch writes: "*Prakṛti* manifest is the ambient curve of the *Gavākṣa*, the Arch of Nature". The most common decorative motifs are vegetation creeper, foam of the celestial waters, sunbirds and rays.

The creepers appear also entwined around the legs of a sculpture of the Jaina saint Gommaṭeśvara. The creepers signify both the sanctity of the saint, showing the extent of his *tapas*, but also emphasize that he is a creature of nature, and that nature pulls him back. A. L. Basham argues that the double message is the message respectively of the brahmins and the craftsmen and that "the usual inspiration of Indian art is not so much a ceaseless quest for the Absolute as a delight in the world as the artist found it, a sensual vitality, and a feeling of growth and movement as regular and organic as the growth of living things upon earth". The double message, noted by Basham, reflects the

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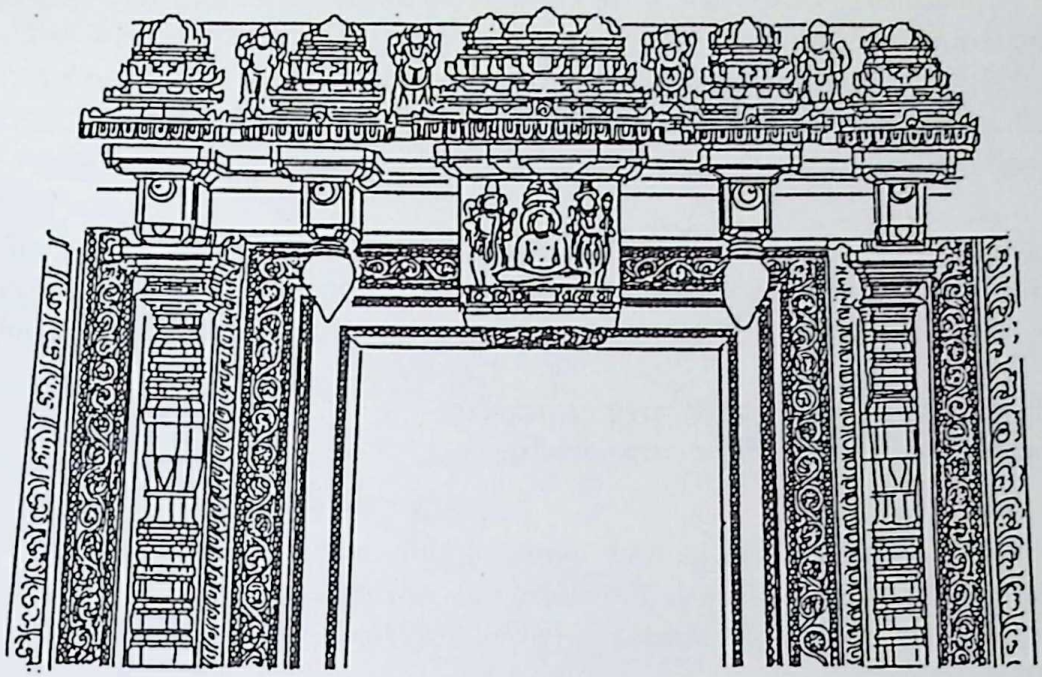

Figure 4: *Latā* on temple door frame: Sravanbelgola, Mysore

two goals of *prakṛti* which are enjoyment (*bhoga*) and deliverance (*apavarga*).

Prakṛti is a technical term in the metrical science. It is a type of metre with twenty-one syllables.

विंशतिस्त्वेकसंयुक्ता प्रकृतिः परिकीर्तिता ।

VDhPur III.3.7ab

(A metre having) 21 syllables (per *pāda*) is called *prakṛti.*

Nārada in the **Saṅgīta-Makaranda**, a medieval text, calls the playing of the seven pure or natural notes (*śuddha svaras*) of the scale ascending from lower to higher starting with *ṣaḍja* (meaning the one giving birth to the other six notes) *prakṛti*, and the descending scale he calls *vikṛti. Prakṛti* here denotes a hierarchy of sounds played in a musical exercise. Practising playing the scale on musical instruments is compared to the emanation and withdrawal of materiality.

प्रकृती द्वे विजानीयात्स्वरतन्त्रेषु संस्थिते ।
तत्रापि च तयोर्मध्ये षड्जादि च निषादकम् ॥
या सा प्रकृतिर्विज्ञेया भरतेन च चर्चिता ।
विकृतिश्च निषादादि षड्जान्तरस्वरपूरिता ॥

SMak p.12

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There are two *prakṛtis* that are known to exist in *svara* and stringed instruments. Among them, (the *svaras*) starting with *ṣaḍja* and ascending up to *niṣāda* (are known as) *prakṛti* which was practiced by Bharata. In *vikṛti* again (*svaras*) start with *niṣāda* and moves on to *ṣaḍja* to complete (the pattern). (Tr. M. Bose)

Bharata in the **Nāṭya-Śāstra** defined drama as the representation of the actions of men of various natures. The concept of *prakṛti* here means the infinite variety of human characters on which the art of poetry and drama is based.

नानाशीलाः प्रकृतयः शीले नाट्यं प्रतिष्ठितम् ।
तस्माल्लोकप्रमाणं हि विज्ञेयं नाट्ययोक्तृभिः ॥

NŚ XXV.123

One should know the various human habits and natures (*prakṛti*) on which drama is based. Therefore the world is the necessary authoritative means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) for the practitioners of drama.

Prakṛti in the **Nāṭya-Śāstra** also means components of the plot of drama (*arthaprakṛtayaḥ*). The first *arthaprakṛti* is called, significantly, →*bīja* (seed) (Vol.I), emphasizing its role as being producer of the main *rasa* of the play.

बीजं बिन्दुः पताका च प्रकरी कार्यमेव च ।
अर्थप्रकृतयः पञ्च ज्ञात्वा योज्या यथाविधि ॥

NŚ XIX.21

The five elements of the plot (*arthaprakṛti*) are the seed (*bīja*), the prominent point (*bindu*), the episode (*patākā*), the episodical incident (*prakarī*), and the outcome (*kārya*). These are to be used according to prescription.

Classification

The use of *prakṛtis* as principles or constituents is common to several Sanskrit textual traditions. According to the **Artha-Śāstra**, *prakṛtis* are the constitutents of the state. According to the **Nāṭya-Śāstra**, *prakṛtis* are the elements of the plot and the different types of humans. In medical science *prakṛti* is used to refer to the seven types of human characters. The earliest use of *prakṛti* in the Proto Sāṃkhya is as a plural term meaning material principles or constituents and it often refers to seven or eight principles. Sāṃkhya, Yoga and Jainism

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use *prakṛti* to refer to eight principal material constituents which are generated from the movement caused by the vicinity of souls to undifferentiated matter (*pradhānam, avyakta, mūlaprakṛti, pudgala*). In Jainism these eight principles are further divided into 148 which are also called *prakṛtis*, while in Sāṃkhya the eight *prakṛtis* produce a group of sixteen secondary principles which are called products (*vikṛtis* or *vikāras*).

The 25 *tattvas* of Sāṃkhya describe the embodied person as well as the world. The creation of the cosmos is similar to the creation of the embodied person. There is an identity of the micro and macro level. Examples of such correlations abound in the **Mahābhārata**, Purāṇas, etc. One such correlation from the **Kramadīpikā** (1300–1400), a commentary on **Tattvasamāsa-Sūtra** (1300–1400), is schematized by Larson (*Sāṃkhya: A Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy*, p. 60–61):

adhyātma	*adhibhūta*	*adhidaiva*
intellect(*buddhi*)	what can be ascertained (*boddhavya*)	Brahmā
egoity (*ahaṃkāra*)	what can be thought (*mantavya*)	Rudra
mind (*manas*)	what can be intended (*saṃkalpayitavya*)	Candra
hearing	what can be heard	Diś
touching	what can be touched	Vāyu
seeing	what can be seen	Āditya
tasting	what can be tasted	Varuṇa
smelling	what can be smelled	Pṛthivī
speaking	what can be spoken	Agni
grasping	what can be grasped	Indra
walking	what can be gone	Viṣṇu
excreting	what can be expelled	Mitra
procreating	what can be sexually enjoyed	Prajāpati

Another table suggests the correlations between the eight *prakṛtis* (*tattvas* which create other *tattvas*) and the divine worlds.

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primordial materiality (*prakṛti*)	Brahmā
intellect (*buddhi*)	Prajāpati
egoity (*ahaṃkāra*)	Indra
sound-*tanmātra* or space (*bhūta*)	Pitṛs
touch-*tanmātra* or wind (*bhūta*)	Gandharvas
form-*tanmātra* or fire (*bhūta*)	Yakṣas or Nāgas
taste-*tanmātra* or water (*bhūta*)	Rakṣasas
smell-*tanmātra* or earth (*bhūta*)	Piśācas

Prakṛti is identical with the three constituents (*guṇas*). The modifications of materiality pre-exist in unmanifest *prakṛti* (*satkārya*) and the transformations of *prakṛti* are real transformations (*pariṇāma*) of materiality. *Prakṛti* is therefore both the subtle material stuff of the world (*sūkṣma, liṅga*) and the gross material stuff (*sthūla*). *Prakṛti* as a holistic term of the mutations of the unmanifest and manifest cosmos is expressed by *triguṇa*(→*guṇa*, Vol. IV). The sentient principle (*sattva*), the mutative principle (*rajas*) and the static principle (*tamas*) are the constituents (*guṇas*) of *prakṛti*. All three *guṇas* are present in all entities, but an entity is dominated by only one of the *guṇas*. It is the material stuff of the totality of the gods as well as humans, animals, birds and plants, mind as well as matter. The divine realm is sāttvic, the human realm is rājasic and the animal and plant realm is tāmasic.

ऊर्ध्वं सत्त्वविशालस्तमोविशालश्च मूलतः सर्गः ।
मध्ये रजोविशालो ब्रह्मादिस्तम्बपर्यन्तः ॥

SāṃKā 54

In the upper (world) (there is) a predominance of *sattva*. (In the) lower creation (there is) a predominance of *tamas*. In the middle, (there is) a predominance of *rajas*. (This is so) from Brahmā down to a blade of grass. (Tr. G.J. Larson)

Human existence is characterized by pain and suffering (*duḥkha*). Pain (*rajas guṇa*) is predominant in the human realm. Plant and animal life is dominated by delusion (*moha, tamas guṇa*), while divine life is dominated by pleasure (*sukha, sattva guṇa*). Happiness (*sukha*) has its ontological base in *prakṛti* as *sattva guṇa*. The **Sāṃkhya-Kārikā** 12 and 13 list the following charcteristics of the three *guṇas*. Since everything is constituted by the three *guṇas*, with one of them dominant, the list of their characteristics is potentially endless.

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sattva	*rajas*	*tamas*
pleasure	pain	stupor
manifestation	activity	limitation
buoyant	stimulating	heavy
shining	moving	enveloping

Everything can in principle be described in terms of the *guṇas.*

Process

Prakṛti is at the beginning of the process of manifestation since it possesses an inherent power to produce. *Prakṛti* is also the subtle stage of the dissolved universe. The universe eternally oscillates between manifestation and non-manifestation. *Prakṛti* stands at the beginning but also at the end of the period of manifestation of matter. The dissolution of *prakṛti* is the goal of the soteriological process.

The goal of the spiritual process is to collect the experience of multiplicity into an interior experience of singleness and universality. This search for the experience of universality characterizes also art. The aesthetic experience is an experience of a generalized emotion transcending the principle of egoity. This realization is called *rasa.* When that experience is characterized by *sattva* it is parallel to the religious experience of *samādhi.* The religious experience and the aesthetic experience are therefore in no sense opposed, on the contrary, they are to a certain degree identical. To achieve *mokṣa*, however, one has ultimately to go beyond *sattva* to a stage in which there is consciousness without objects (*asaṃprajñātasamādhi*).

> यदा निर्धूतरजस्तमोमलं बुद्धिसत्त्वं पुरुषस्यान्यताप्रत्ययमात्राधिकारं दग्धक्लेशबीजं भवति तदा पुरुषस्यशुद्धिसारूप्यमिवापन्नं भवति । तदा पुरुषस्योपचरितभोगाभावः शुद्धिः । ...चरिताधिकाराश्चैतस्यामवस्थायां गुणा न पुरुषस्य दृश्यत्वेन पुनरुपतिष्ठन्ते । तत् पुरुषस्य कैवल्यम् ।
>
> YSūBh III.54

When the *sattva* of the thinking-substance is freed from the defilement of the *rajas* and *tamas*, and when it has no task other than with the presented-idea of the difference of (the *sattva*) from the Self, and when the seeds of the hindrances within itself have been burned, then the *sattva* enters into a state of purity equal to that

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> of the Self. When-this-is-so (*tadā*), purity is the cessation of the experience which is falsely attributed to the Self.... In this state the aspects, their task done, do not again submit themselves as objects-for-sight to the Self. That is the Self's isolation. (Tr. J.H. Woods)

For that liberated *puruṣa* the manifestations of *prakṛti* do not again emerge. He is called a *muktakuśala* because he transcends the *guṇas* (*muktaḥ kuśala ityeva bhavati guṇātītatvād-*, YSūBh II.27). For all other non-liberated *puruṣas*, who are bound by *karman*, the manifestations continue uninterrupted. *Prakṛti* is a process with two purposes: enjoyment (*bhoga*) and liberation (*apavarga*). *Prakṛti* is a soteriological material principle because it was discovered by the ancient sages that the process of manifestation of matter was such that it was usable for the purpose of liberation.

Conclusion

Prakṛti as a concept of matter, according to Sāṃkhya and Yoga systems of religious thought, is neither the landscape, which forms the background of human activity, nor the different things in nature, nor the natural resources, which are transformed by human technology. Rather materiality is the material power within the phenomena.

The unmanifest source of nature (*mūlaprakṛti*) is the equilibrium of the three constituents (*guṇas*). The first product of the relation between unmanifest materiality and the soul (*puruṣa*), the intellect (*buddhi*), is dominated by the constituent luminosity (*sattva guṇa*). In the further modifications of materiality layers upon layers of gradually thicker and darker matter cover the luminosity constituent of materiality. The further from the material source the thicker is the covering of darkness. According to this Indian view of nature, plants and animals, being predominantly tāmasic, are further from the source of nature than humans who are predominantly rājasic. Plants and animals accordingly have a thicker covering of darkness. The hierarchy in the human society likewise represents the distance from the source of materiality. Purity represents closeness to the source of nature. Brahmins or sādhus, according to this view, are closer to the origin of matter and therefore the part of matter in which *sattva guṇa* dominates.

The modifications of materiality do not represent progress, but, on the contrary, the modifications of materiality represent a development from high to low, from subtle to gross, from a dominance of luminosity to a dominance of darkness. Modifications imply more layers of coverings of darkness and heavy

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matter (*tamas*). The less differentiated matter has more purity (*sattva*) than the more differentiated. The yogin who leaves society to meditate in the wilderness moves closer to the undifferentiated source of nature. He moves away from the differentiation of materiality which constitutes society, and away from the coverings of *tamas guṇa* implied in the social differentiation, to a social undifferentiated stage which is more sāttvic and less differentiated.

Prakṛti is the producer of all matter which is transformed through art, and since the material effects pre-exist in the material cause, artists never produce anything new, they only make manifest what is already present, but unmanifest, in *prakṛti*. The aesthetic experience is analogous to, but ultimately different from, the religious experience of transcending multiplicity and egoity. *Prakṛti*, being immensely generous, and acting totally unselfish, is usable both for aesthetic enjoyment and for the liberation of the soul.

Prakṛti is the innate nature, the immanent order of the material world, and its power of transformation. It is the subtle and the gross material stuff, it is the unmanifest nature as well as the manifest. *Prakṛti* is continuously changing: the unmanifest becomes manifest, the manifest becomes again unmanifest. At this very moment, however, everything, an infinite number of universes, that was, is and will be, the unmanifest and the manifest, is in existence, and is held together as causes and effects, within this immense material power.

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BHŪTA–MAHĀBHŪTA

Overview

Bhūta (mfn.) is a word of current usage in the sense of 'being', 'past', 'real' and also a religious and philosophical term of very extensive contents. Its root *bhū-* signifies 'to be' with the connotation 'to become, to grow, thrive'. This connotation is sometimes emphasized in the derivatives. Thus the concept of *bhūta* is primarily the concept of creature, i.e. being as produced and growing, but not absolute being. In history two aspects of this concept were considerably developed, the living being and the material element. The former is the general concept of all creatures, including all species, human and non-human. Or, more often, it was specialised in the designation of mythological figures having an intermediary status between man and God. Bhūtas are supra-human because they have supernatural powers, and they are inferior to the great gods, as in the case of the Bhūtagaṇas who form the court or army of Śiva. They are generally, but not always, malevolent, dangerous or at least disquieting spirits, which are propitiated with a special category of offerings called *bali*.

The concept of *bhūta* or *mahābhūta* as material element, mostly classified as five, was developed especially in the Sāṃkhya and Yoga school. Sāṃkhya proposed a transformationist view of matter the evolutes of which are the components of human psychism, and finally five gross elements are defined in correlation with the five senses (→*indriya*, Vol. IV). The properties of the elements were also conceived in correlation with human sensibility. On its part, the Yoga school of thought has proposed a means of progressive investigation of their subtle essences and causes. This concept has been integrated in Purāṇic and Tāntric cultures as the starting point of theories of creation, of descriptions of gods and their immanence in the world, of ritualistic processes of purification etc.

In the Arts, the mythological figures which surround images of Śiva are an iconographic theme. The elements find a place in plastic or literary expression, when an artist or a poet wants to go beyond the surface of things and contemplates their inner principles.

Etymology and Cognate Words

Bhūta is one among many words derived from the root *bhū-* 'to be'. *Bhū-* is the Sanskrit form of an old Indo-European root which expresses the idea to

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grow, to thrive, prosper, the dynamic aspect of being. In the Indo-European field it has produced roots signifying 'to be', 'to become', 'to come to being', 'to grow', etc. (see Latin *fu-i*, Greek *phu-ō* 'to grow', etc.) In Sanskrit, *bhū-* means 'to be', but with a shade of meaning which differentiates it from the root *as-* 'to be'. *Bhū-* refers to being considered in the process of creation, the idea of being produced, taking birth, becoming, getting enriched etc., whereas *as-* refers to the being considered in its accomplished state. Words derived from these roots betray their original difference. *Sattva* refers to the state of existence of an entity which has acquired its full self nature. *Bhāva* refers to the process of creation of an entity, to its coming to being, its being in the making, its transformation, its growth; *bhūti* refers to well-being, enrichment, even self-transcendance, supernatural power, etc. Indian grammarians consider that there are two roots of the same form, *bhū sattāyām* 'to be' and *bhū prāptau* 'to reach' (Pāṇini's Dhātupāṭha), and thus explain the manyfold layers of meaning of their derivatives.

Bhūta is the past participle of *bhū-*. It is used as an adjective in the sense of 'past', 'produced', 'happened', but also as a noun, masculine with the meaning 'living being, creature', neuter with the meaning 'well-being', 'reality' and 'element', optionally masculine or neuter when refering to a supernatural being, the neuter being preferred if the being is malevolent such as ghost (exceptionally feminine: *bhūtinī* in Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa Tantra VIII. 4).

Indian grammarians classify these meanings with reference to the roots and suffixes accepted by them. Three types of etymologies appear in grammatical works, commentaries on lexicons etc. *Bhū sattāyām* with the suffix *kta* expressing the sense of 'agent' and 'past'; in that case *bhūtam* means *abhavat* 'it was' and refers to that which has come to being, a created being, element etc. *Bhū prāptau* of the 10th class with the suffix *ṇic* dropped before the suffix *kta* used in the sense of object of the action, in which case *bhūta* means 'reached, acquired' etc. *Bhū sattāyām* with the suffix *ktin* to form the noun *bhūti* 'well-being, power', and with the additional possessive suffix *ac: bhūti* + *ac* = *bhūta* referring to a being possessing supernatural powers. There is also a homonymous word *bhūti* signifying 'ashes' (may be of Dravidian origin: *budi*); the ashes covering the body of ghosts coming out of the funeral pyre, the ashes used as a body ornament by the Bhūtagaṇas of Śiva, are called *bhūti* or *vibhūti*, therefore in their case the above etymology can be understood as 'one who has ashes'. *Bhūta* is used adverbially with the invariant suffix *tasil: bhūtataḥ* 'really'.

Mahābhūta is *karmadhāraya samāsa* or determinative compound of *mahat* 'great' or 'gross' and *bhūta*. It is used in masculine gender to refer to a 'great living being', especially a supernatural one such as a Siddha, and chiefly in

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neuter to refer to the gross elements, earth etc.

It is to be noted that *bhūta* appears very frequently in compound words. When used at the end of a compound it expresses the sense of *sama* or *tulya* 'equal to' or the sense of *svarūpa* 'having the nature of'. With the preverb *pra* in *prabhūta* it connotes the idea of abundance and hugeness. It is the first member of a number of very common or technical designations, such as *bhūtagrāma* 'class of beings', *bhūtātman* refering to the incarnated soul (*jīvātman*), *bhūtādi* qualification of the *ahaṃkāra* which is the origin of the elements, etc.

Cognates of *bhūta* are numerous as the root *bhū-* is the base of a great number of derivatives. Noteworthy are derivatives signifying the idea of plenty: *bhūti* 'prosperity', *vibhūti* 'wonderful manifestation' (cf. Greek *phú-sis*), *vibhava* 'richness'. Significant is the fact that many derivatives of *bhū* express the idea of birth and creation: *bhava, sambhava* 'birth', *bhāvanā* 'creation' and 'mental representation' which is a creation by the mind; *bhāva* refers to mental states and to all mental productions.

Layers of Meaning

Bearing the afore-mentioned etymologies in mind, the Indian lexicographers have listed multiple meanings for the word *bhūta*. They indicate its exceptional polysemy. For instance, Amarasiṃha deals with the word three times. Firstly in a list of ten beings of divine origin (*devayoni*):

विद्याधरा ... सिद्धो भूतोऽमी देवयोनयः ॥

AmKo I.1.11

Vidyādharas,...Siddhas, Bhūtas, these [ten] are of divine origin.

Kṣīrasvāmin explains:

भवन्तीति भूता बालग्रहादयो हिंस्रा रुद्रानुचरा वा, यतोऽसौ भूतपतिः ।

Bhūta – the word derived from *bhū-* 'to exist' means 'who exist' – are hostile beings such as the demons who seize or possess children, or are the followers of Rudra who, therefore, is Lord of Bhūtas.

The commentator Bhānuji Dīkṣita (17th Cent. A.D.) explains the meaning as: *bhūtir asyāsti* "one who has supernatural powers." For the first commentator the name *bhūta* declares the existnce of those unseen spirits; for the second it describes their powers.

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Then Amarasiṃha (AmKo III.1.104) places *bhūta* in a list of six words signifying *prāpta* 'reached', in which case Kṣīrasvāmin and Bhānuji Dīkṣita derive it from *bhū prāptau*. A third mention of the same word is given with a list of six meanings:

युक्ते क्ष्मादावृते भूतं प्राण्यतीते समे त्रिषु ।

AmKo III.3.78

Bhūta, in neuter gender, means: proper thing, earth and other elements, truth; in the three genders it means: living being, past and equal to.

Kṣīrasvāmin gives an example for each of these meanings:

युक्ते यथा - यथा भूतवादी प्रामाणिकः स्यात् । क्ष्मादौ यथा - महाभूतानि । ऋतं सत्यं यथा - भूतमप्यनुपन्यस्तं हीयते व्यवहारतः (याज्ञ° स्मृति II.19cd) । प्राणिनि यथा - भूतग्रामः । अतीते यथा - भूते लुङ् । समस्तुल्यो यथा - सुहृद्भूतोऽयम् । ग्रहेऽपि यथा - भूतमियं ब्राह्मणी । प्राप्ते यथा - इत्थंभूतं, भवति स्म भाव्यते स्मेति भू प्राप्तौ ।

Example for the meaning 'proper': one who says proper things should be the authoritative source. For the earth, etc.: the gross elements. For '*ṛta*', i.e. truth: what has not been stated, even if it is true, is dropped from the case. For 'living being': a group of creatures. For 'past': the suffix *luṅ* (preterite) is used to express the past (Pā III.2.84,110). For '*sama*', i.e. equal to: he is equal to a friend. The word also means 'demon': this brahmin woman is demon. It also means *prāpta*: it reached, it was reached, from the root *bhū*- signifying 'to reach'.

Here Bhānuji Dīkṣita derives *bhūta* from *bhū sattāyām* with the gloss: *abhavat* 'it was'. This explanation shows that for him the past sense is important. This gloss can be understood as applicable to the different meanings, only if we consider such shade of sense of the root as 'production'. *Bhūta* is an entity which 'was produced', a creature, living or insentient; the element is the concept of matter as created, as the seat of perpetual transformation. In Sanskrit, the past participle (suffix *kta*) often expresses the present result of a past event. *Bhūta* is an entity which is existing, thanks to its past birth and growth; thus it is declared as real and true.

The **Śabdakalpadruma** (19th Cent. A.D.) counts about twenty meanings. *Bhūtam*, neuter, means: proper thing, rule, element, truth, malevolent beings, creature, any substance moving or unmoving, reality; *bhūta* in the three genders

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means: living being, past, equal to, true, having the nature of; *bhūta* masculine means: being of divine origin, young man, great yogin, the 14th day of the dark half of a month, a herb destroying evil spirits, the Gaṇas in the service of Śambhu.

In this rich semantic material four layers are prominent. The first centres around the idea of past, the second around the idea of reality, the third around that of living being, natural or supernatural, the last around the idea of inanimate thing and especially the element of matter. Historically the meanings 'become, past' and 'creature' in general are the oldest, being well-attested in the **Ṛgveda**. The meanings 'malevolent spirit' and 'element' appear at a later date, at the end of the Vedic period, and were fully developed only in the classical period, the concept of element with its technical designation of *mahābhūta* mostly in Śāstric and philosophical circles.

Development of the Concept

Bhūta appears only twelve times in the **Ṛgveda**. The meaning is 'being' and the contexts indicate that it refers to all what is created, the world in general or the living beings. We have to recognize the original value of the root *bhū-* which is "to come to being, to become, to grow". The idea of past appears also clearly when the word is used together with *bhavya* which may be interpreted as 'future' or 'becoming', being in the present course of living. That is illustrated by the use of *bhūta* in Puruṣa-Sūkta, where the world is identified with the cosmic being:

पुरुष एवेदं सर्वं यद्भूतं यच्च भव्यम् ।
* * *
पादोऽस्य विश्वा भूतानि त्रिपादस्यामृतं दिवि ॥

ṚV X.90.2ab, 3cd

Puruṣa is this all, that has been and that will be ...
A fourth of him is all beings. (Tr. A.A. Macdonell)

Another Ṛgvedic instance is:

महत्तन्नाम गुह्यं पुरुस्पृग् येन भूतं जनयो येन भव्यम् ।

ṚV X.55.2ab

That is the great, much-desired Name with which you created everything, past and present. (Based on the tr. by K.F. Geldner)

The world as a whole is referred to by the expression *bhūtam... bhavyam*. As the object of the verb *janayaḥ* 'you engendered' it does not express past and

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future, but describes the world in its origin and present growth: you engendered all that was born and that is growing. Here Sāyaṇa interprets *nāma* as referring to Indra's body, made of *ākāśa*. He compares this *ṛc* with another passage of the **Taittirīya Āraṇyaka**: *ākāśād vāyuḥ* (VIII.1) which describes a similar process of formation of the world.

In the **Yajur-Veda** and **Atharva-Veda** *bhūta* is used more often with the same meanings. The sense of past and the association with future is found in the section called *Camaka*: *bhūtaṃ ca me bhaviṣyac ca me* (TSam IV.7.2). The sense of creature appears in:

हिरण्यगर्भः समवर्तताग्रे भूतस्य जातः पतिरेक आसीत् ।

TSam IV.1.8.3

The golden germ first arose, born he was the only lord of creation. (Tr. A.B. Keith)

The sense of living creature becomes more prominent and in a few cases *bhūta* refers to superior beings; for instance:

सिँहीरस्या वह देवान् देवयते यजमानाय स्वाहा भूतेभ्यस्त्वा ...

TSam I.2.12.3

[Oh Uttara-vedi!] Thou art lioness, bring the gods to the pious sacrificer, hail to beings thee. (Tr. A.B. Keith)

The event is the *soma*-sacrifice. The making out of the higher altar (*uttara-vedi*) which is to the east of the great altar (*mahā-vedi*) is going on. The above *mantra* is recited when the *sruc* is taken up. The commentator Bhaṭṭa Bhāskara sees a reference to gods and quotes another passage of the text identifying *bhūta* as gods: *ya eva devā bhūtāḥ* "those *bhūtas* who are gods" (TSam VI.2.8). Sāyaṇa also renders *bhūta* as *cirantanebhyo devebhyaḥ* "the ancient ones, the gods".

A passage of **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa**, in the context of Agnihotra, identifies *ātman* and *bhūta* understood in the sense of 'past' by J. Eggeling, probably referring to that which is past as created, and which is real at the same time:

आत्मैव भूतम् । अद्धा हि तद्यद्भूतम् अद्धो तद्यात्मा ।

ŚBr II.3.1.25

The past is the self, for certain is that which is past and certain also is that which is a self. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

The sense of past has been clearly isolated by the most ancient Indian grammarians, Pāṇini, authors of Prātiśākhyas, etc. who use *bhūta* to refer to

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past time as expressed by verbal suffixes of past tenses and a few primary suffixes. The **Atharva-Prātiśākhya** calls *bhūtakaraṇa* 'instrument of past' (tr. L. Renou) the increment *a-* of verbs in the past tense.

In the last portion of the Vedic literature, i.e. in Upaniṣads and Kalpa-Sūtras, appear two specialized meanings which became very common in classical Sanskrit, i.e. supernatural malevolent beings and material elements. Their evolution and dissemination can be examined separately.

Bhūta in the sense of "living being, supernatural being, malevolent spirit":

The sense of 'living being' is well-attested in ancient Vedic literature, but with reference to all the created beings. However, we have to note that a text as early as the **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** uses a classification of beings, in which *bhūtas* occupy an intermediary position between men and gods. It defines five specific cults (*yajña*) addressed to five classes of beings, as follows:

पञ्चैव महायज्ञाः । तान्येव महासत्राणि भूतयज्ञो मनुष्ययज्ञः पितृयज्ञो देवयज्ञो ब्रह्मयज्ञ इति ॥
अहरहर्भूतेभ्यो बलिं हरेत् । तथैतम्भूतयज्ञं समाप्नोति ।

ŚBr XI.5.6.1–2

1. There are five great sacrifices, and they, indeed, are great sacrificial sessions, – to wit, the sacrifice to beings, the sacrifice to men, the sacrifice to the Fathers, the sacrifice to the gods, and the sacrifice to the Brahman. 2. Day by day one should offer an oblation to beings: thus he performs that sacrifice to beings. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

The limitation of the scope of the word *bhūta* to supernatural beings appears clearly in the **Baudhāyana Śrauta-Sūtra:**

देवासुरा ह यत्र महासंग्रामं संयेतिरे तद्धेमानि भूतानि द्वेधैव व्यपचक्रमुर्देवानेवान्वन्यान्यसुरानेवान्वन्यानि ।

BŚrSū XVIII.46

When the gods and demons fought the fierce battle these beings fled to both the sides; some beings followed gods and some beings demons. (Tr. V.A. Kulkarny)

The beings described here are those which can approach the gods and demons. They are not terrestrial and not gods or demons. They have an intermediary position. They are also separated in two opposite groups. The same

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intermediary position, in the form of residence in *antarikṣa*, which is the intermediary atmosphere between earth and heaven, appears in the etymology of the word *mātṛ* in the **Nirukta**:

> मातान्तरिक्षम् । निर्मीयन्तेऽस्मिन् भूतानि ।
>
> Nir II.8
>
> Mother (*mātṛ*) means atmosphere: in it, the beings are measured out (*nir-mā*). (Tr. L. Sarup)

Mātṛ is considered as derived from the root *mā* with the suffix *tṛ* being used in the sense of location of the action expressed by the root. Accordingly the sense of the word is: that location in which the action of measuring completely takes place. Yāska explains that it is the intermediary space (*antarikṣa*) between heaven and earth; and that which is measured in that space is the beings who are to be understood as residents of that space. According to the commentator Devarājayajvan *bhūta* is used to denote water. However, we may also recognize here an early evocation of those supernatural beings which in classical literature will be regularly described as the specific residents of *antarikṣa*.

The Gṛhya-Sūtras are more explicit about the specific ritual of *bhūtayajña* or *baliharaṇa*. A *bali* is an offering of cooked food, not in fire, but scattered on the ground. The term *bali* will always remain associated with the *bhūtas*. In this level of Vedic ritual the *bhūtas* are not only some major Vedic gods, such as Indra, but also minor entities, even waters, trees etc. The **Āśvalāyana Gṛhya-Sūtra** (I.2.3–11) deals with this ritual:

> यद्बलिं करोति स भूतयज्ञः ।
>
> ĀśvaGṛhSū III.1.3
>
> The worship of *bhūtas* is an offering of a *bali*.

A definite reference to *bhūtas* as kinds of spirits which must be propitiated by offerings comes in the same text:

> ये भूताः प्रचरन्ति दिवानक्तं बलिमिच्छन्तः ।
>
> ĀśvaGṛhSū LXVI.47
>
> Those beings which move day and night, desiring offerings.

This concept became very popular in later times.

The part of classical literature which follows closely the Vedic line contains many usages of the concept of being and living beings. The created living being becomes the incarnated soul, the being in the unceasing cycle of births

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(*saṃsāra*). This concept raised a philosophical question: what are births (*jāti*)? Are they an evolution undergone by the being? Is it possible to declare being as changeable, undergoing a process of evolution? Is birth the passage of non-being to being? In that case how the non-being becomes being at the time of creation? Disputes between dualists and non-dualists on the nature of creation are mentioned in Gauḍapāda's **Māṇḍūkya-Kārikā**:

भूतस्य जातिमिच्छन्ति वादिनः केचिदेव हि ।
अभूतस्यापरे धीरा विवदन्तः परस्परम् ॥
भूतं न जायते किंचिदभूतं नैव जायते ।
विवदन्तोऽद्वया ह्येवमजातिं ख्यापयन्ति ते ॥

MāṇḍKā IV.3–4

Some disputants accept birth for the being; others accept it for the non-being; proud of their understanding they quarrel among themselves. "Being does not undergo birth at all, nor the non-being is born" thus disputing among themselves, they are also non-dualists and proclaim the absence of birth [of the being].

According to Śaṅkara these disputants are two schools of dualists: the first ones are the Sāṃkhyas, the others are the Vaiśeṣikas and Naiyāyikas. For the first, birth is a process of passage from a subtle state to a gross state; the same being can undergo this evolution; thus birth pertains to being. For the other birth is the passage of non-being to being. The non-dualist considers that the real being does not undergo any real change; birth is a superimposed illusion; there is no birth in reality. He humourously says that the dualist disputants establish the absence of birth, as each one refutes the concept of birth of his opponent.

In the line of Vedic literature the word *bhūta* is very often used in the general sense of 'living being'. But in the light of those philosophical speculations the concept receives a new delineation. *Bhūta* is a being engaged in the cycle of rebirths, it is the perpetually renascent being, going from body to body, from species to species according to the nature of past deeds. The law of *karman*, which is made of *dharma* and *adharma*, brings in the idea of different classes of beings, those who have a good and those who have a bad *karman*. Such a classification occurs in the **Bhagavad-Gītā**:

द्वौ भूतसर्गौ लोकेऽस्मिन् दैव आसुर एव च ।

BhG XVI.6ab (borrowed by AgPur 381.39)

There are two manifestations of sentient beings in this world, the divine and the anti-divine.

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This is told in a context which enumerates the antithetic qualities of two classes of men. It is to be understood, as indicated by the commentators, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, etc., in relation with the concept of transmigration. The word *sarga* in *bhūtasarga* does not refer to a creation *ex-nihilio*, but rather to a manifestation of the unmanifest. *Bhūta* is the everchanging being, going upwards or downwards. The **Bhagavad-Gītā** uses clearly this word for the surface being, when it describes its external transitory aspect, which is opposed to *sat*, the inner, true, unchanging being.

अव्यक्तादीनि भूतानि व्यक्तमध्यानि भारत ।
अव्यक्तनिधनान्येव तत्र का परिदेवना ॥

BhG II.28

Unmanifests are the beginnings of contingent beings, manifest their middle course, unmanifest again their ends: what cause for mourning here. (Tr. R.C. Zaehner)

भूतग्रामः स एवायं भूत्वा भूत्वा प्रलीयते ।
रात्र्यागमेऽवशः पार्थ प्रभवत्यहरागमे ॥

भूतग्रामो भूतसमुदायः स्थावरजङ्गमलक्षणो यः पूर्वस्मिन्कल्प आसीत् स एवायं नान्यो भूत्वा भूत्वा पुनरहरागमे प्रलीयते पुनः पुना रात्र्यागमेऽह्नःक्षयेऽवशोऽस्वतन्त्र एव पार्थ, प्रभवति अवश एवाहरागमे ।

BhG with ŚBh VIII.19

Yes, this whole host of beings comes ever a new to be, at fall of night it dissolves away all helpless, at dawn of day it rises up again. (Tr. R.C. Zaehner)

The host of beings, i.e. the mobile and immobile beings which existed in the previous *kalpa*, it is that host indeed, and no other, which is born repeatedly at dawn of day, which is dissolved again at fall of night, i.e. cessation of day, and which, being helpless, O Pārtha, is born once again at dawn of day. (Based on the tr. by H.N. Chakravarty)

न च मत्स्थानि भूतानि पश्य मे योगमैश्वरम् ।
भूतभृन्न च भूतस्थो ममात्मा भूतभावनः ॥

BhG IX.5

And (yet) contingent beings do not subsist in Me, – behold my sovereign skill-in-works: my Self sustains [all] beings, It does not subsist in them; It causes them to-be-and-grow. (Tr. R.C. Zaehner)

स्वयमेवात्मनात्मानं वेत्थ त्वं पुरुषोत्तम ।
भूतभावन भूतेश देवदेव जगत्पते ॥ BhG X.15

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By [Your] Self You yourself do know [Your] Self, O You all-highest Person, You who bestow being on contingent beings, Lord of [all] beings, God of gods, and Lord of [all] the world. (Tr. R.C. Zaehner)

The concept of *bhūta* as being of transitory nature is well-illustrated in the context of creation in the **Mahābhārata** and **Manu Smṛti**:

ययातीक्ष्वाकुवंशश्च राजर्षीणां च सर्वशः ।
संभूता बहवो वंशा भूतसर्गाः सविस्तराः ॥
भूतस्थानानि सर्वाणि ...

MBh I.1.45–46a

The family of Yayāti and Ikṣvāku, of all the Rājarṣis, came to being, and also numerous generations, very abundant creations of beings and their places of abode. (Based on the tr. by P.C. Roy)

मम योनिर्महद्ब्रह्म तस्मिन्गर्भं दधाम्यहम् ।
संभवः सर्वभूतानां ततो भवति भारत ॥

MBh VI.36.3

The great Brahma is the womb in which I place the germ. Thence, O Bhārata, take place the births of all beings. (Tr. M.N. Dutt)

ईदृशो मर्त्यधर्मोऽयं धात्रा निर्दिष्ट उच्यते ।
विनाशः सर्वभूतानां कालपर्यायकारितः ॥

MBh IX.64.22

Subjection to death has been ordained by the Creator himself. Death comes to all in course of Time. (Tr. M.N. Dutt)

एतदन्तास्तु गतयो ब्रह्माद्याः समुदाहृताः ।
घोरेऽस्मिन्भूतसंसारे नित्यं सततयायिनि ॥

Manu I.50

The [various] conditions in this always terrible and constantly changing circle of births and deaths to which created beings are subject, are stated to begin with [that of] Brahman and to end with [that of] these [just mentioned immoyable creatures]. (Tr. G. Bühler)

According to the commentators Medhātithi and Kullūka, *bhūta* 'created beings' means *kṣetrajña* 'embodied souls'.

एष सर्वाणि भूतानि पञ्चभिर्व्याप्य मूर्तिभिः ।
जन्मवृद्धिक्षयैर्नित्यं संसारयति चक्रवत् ॥

Manu XII.124

He pervades all created beings in the five forms, and constantly

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makes them, by means of birth, growth and decay, revolve like the wheels [of a chariot]. (Tr. G. Bühler)

The use of the word *bhūta* to refer specifically to supernatural beings, especially malevolent ones, is well-documented in classical Sanskrit, especially in Tāntric literature. It can be traced at the end of Vedic literature, but that is probably under the starting influence of Tāntric culture. This influence is seen in the **Bhagavad-Gītā** which knows already a ritual connected with spirits thus called (*bhūtejyā*):

यान्ति देवव्रता देवान् पितॄन् यान्ति पितृव्रताः ।
भूतानि यान्ति भूतेज्या यान्ति मद्याजिनोऽपि माम् ॥

BhG IX.25

To the gods go the gods' devotees, to the ancestors their votaries, to disembodied spirits go the worshippers of these, but those who worship Me shall come to Me. (Tr. R.C. Zaehner)

Commentators identify the Bhūtas mentioned in this stanza as Vināyakas, the group of Mātṛs, four sisters (Śaṅkara), Yakṣas, Rakṣases, Piśācas etc. (Rāmānuja), Bhadrakālī etc. (Hanumat's Paiśāca Bhāṣya), the sixty-four Yoginīs etc. (Dhanapati's Bhāṣyotkarṣadīpikā).

Manu follows the Vedic line and prescribes the duty of *bhūtayajña*, one of the obligatory five *yajñas*. He conceives the Bhūtas as beings who move by day or by night:

विश्वेभ्यश्चैव देवेभ्यो बलिमाकाश उत्क्षिपेत् ।
दिवाचरेभ्यो भूतेभ्यो नक्तंचारिभ्य एव च ॥

Manu III.90

He should throw a *bali* in the air for the Viśvedevas, for the Beings who move by day, and for those who move by night.

Supernatural Bhūtas have a special link with Śiva who is called their Lord. They generally appear as servants of the God. As soldiers, they have a dreadful appearance and carry all kinds of weapons. They form an immeasurable army which, for instance, is sent to conquer Tripura (ŚPur, Rudra Saṃhitā, Yuddhakhaṇḍa III). They form also the dreadful company of Śiva when he dances in burial grounds. But as servants of the God in his serene forms and activities they are represented as dwarfish, grotesque figures of grotesque but benevolent look. Śiva in Tāntric literature often refers to them as the recipients

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Figure 5: *Bhūtagaṇa Padmanidhi*: Tamilnadu, Madras Museum

of a special class of offerings called *bali*. A *bali* is an offering of a cooked preparation (*caru*) such as rice, simply dropped on the ground. It is different from *naivedya* which is conceived as a meal comprising several preparations, offered on a tray with more ceremony. The *naivedya* is the main offering to the main deity, the *bali* is auxiliary and generally goes to minor entities which provide a court to the former. As in the **Svacchanda Tantra**:

पश्चाद्बलिः प्रदातव्यो मातृणां भूतसंहतेः ॥
* * *
भूता ये विविधाकारा दिव्यभौमान्तरिक्षगाः ॥
पातालतलसंस्थाश्च शिवयागे सुभाविताः ।
ध्रुवादिसर्वभूताश्च ऐन्द्र्याद्याशास्थिताश्च ये ॥
स्वाहाकारसमायोगात् तृप्यन्तूच्चारयन्क्षिपेत् ।

SvT III.97cd, 207cd–209ab

After that an offering should be given to the Mothers (superintending deities of syllabic groups) and to the host of Bhūtas. The Bhūtas having different shapes, abiding in upper heaven, earth and intermediary space, or staying in the lower level of the nether world, should be well meditated upon during the worship of Śiva; uttering a *mantra* beginning with *Om*, mentioning all the Bhūtas and those who stay in the quarters north-east etc., having *svāhā* joined at the end and the words 'may they be satisfied', one should scatter [the *bali*]. (Based on the tr. by H.N. Chakravarty)

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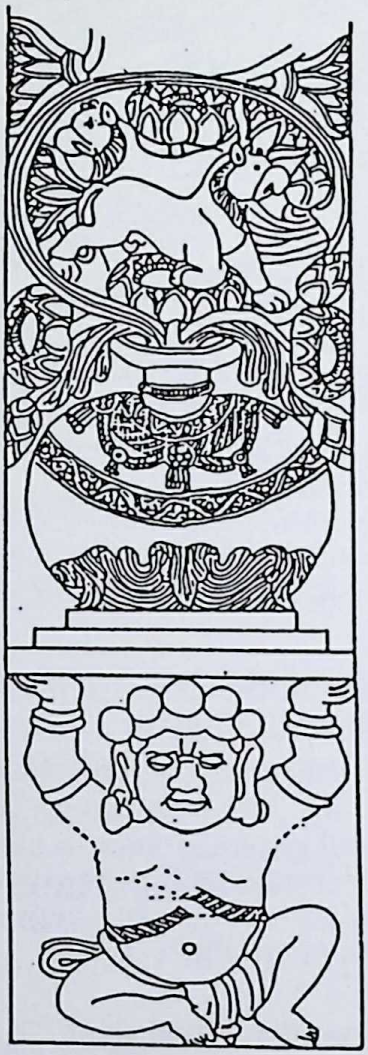

Figure 6: *Bhūtagaṇa* as weight-carrier: Amaravati

A *bali* offering is a part of many cults and many particular acts in a given cult. Its general purpose seems to be to propitiate divinities and entities which are not generally the object of a specific cult. A homage with a *mantra*, an offering is made for them collectively, or by groups, to satisfy them and avert their eventual bad influence. Among the groups, Pitṛ, Dikpāla, Mātṛ, Graha, etc. the Bhūtas are not well-defined and the word may be interpreted in different ways, devilish spirits, or the different aspects of natural beings. See the interpretation of Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha in his *Vṛtti* on the *kriyāpāda* of **Mṛgendra Āgama**, in the context of a morning *tarpaṇa* prescribed by the Āgama for the Bhūtas:

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भूतादीन् अङ्गुलिपर्वसन्धिभिस्तर्पयेदिति स्थितम् । भूतग्रामः पशुमृगपक्षि-सरीसृपभेदाच्चतुर्विधः । आदिग्रहणात्सागरद्रुमादयः । तथा च योगयाज्ञवल्कीये "ततः संतर्पयेदेवम्" इत्युपक्रम्य -

वनस्पतीनोषधीश्च भूतग्रामं चतुर्विधम् ।
नदीर्देवान् द्रुमान्नागान् सागरान् पर्वतानपि ॥

MṛgĀ kp, vṛtti *ad* II.18a

It is established that [the worshipper] should make a *tarpaṇa* to the Bhūtas etc. [allowing water to follow] through the finger-joints. The class of Bhūtas has four sections; domestic and wild animals, birds, serpents. By *ādi* etc. seas, trees etc. are mentioned. The same is told in Yogayājñavalkīya which, starting with the words "then one should offer *tarpaṇas* thus" says: "to the plants and herbs to the fourfold class of *bhūtas*, the rivers, gods, trees, serpents, seas and mountains".

Similarly the **Mayamata** records a prayer uttered by a *Śilpin* before cutting a tree selected for a building:

अपक्रामन्तु भूतानि देवताश्च सगुह्यकाः ।
युष्मभ्यं तु बलं भूयः सोमो दिशतु पादपाः ॥
शिवमस्तु महीपुत्रा ! देवताश्च सगुह्यकाः ।
कर्मैतत्साधयिष्यामि क्रियतां वासपर्ययः ॥

Mayam XV.89–90

"Let Bhūtas, Deities with Guhyakas step aside. May Soma bestow a plenty of strength on you, O Trees! Let there be auspiciousness O Sons of the earth, Deities and Guhyakas, I shall accomplish this act, may your place of residence be changed".

In the light of these verses, where it is clearly stated that the Bhūtas, deities, etc. dwell in the trees, we may understand the above-mentioned verses of **Yogayājñavalkīya** as referring to the spirits inhabiting trees, rivers, seas, etc.

Medical literature deals with Bhūtas as a possible source of disease. In this case only the Bhūtas of the obnoxious class are considered. When Suśruta mentions a collyrium which enables a king to become *adhṛṣyaḥ sarvabhūtānām* "whom no Bhūta can vanquish' (SuSam Uttaratantra XVIII.93) the commentator Ḍalhaṇa explains that there are eight types of Bhūtas: Deva, Asura, Gandharva, Yakṣa, Rakṣas, Pitṛ, Piśāca, Nāga. Bhūtas come in a list of malevolent or repulsive beings which a man about to die is said to see as a reflection of himself in a mirror etc. (SuSam SūSthā XXX.21–22). Caraka is explicit also about the supernatural origin of some diseases, adding that there is some mental aberration on the part of the patient. It is out of ignorance, or through

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wrong knowledge, that man has some connection with the Bhūtas, poison, etc. which are the cause of diseases:

ये भूतविषवाय्वग्निसंप्रहारादिसंभवाः ।
नृणामागन्तवो रोगाः प्रज्ञा तेष्वपराध्यति ॥

CarSam SūSthā VII.51

In the exogenous diseases which are caused in men by Bhūtas, poison, wind, fire, blows etc. the mind is at fault.

The commentator Cakrapāṇi Datta explains *bhūta* as *piśāca* etc.

In the line of this concept, medical literature has a section called *bhūtavidyā* 'science of spirits' which prescribes cures of diseases of supernatural origin, mostly with the help of religious rites, *japas, homas,* offerings, etc. The **Suśruta Saṃhitā** has three chapters entitled *Bhūtavidyātantra* placed towards the end of its last section or *Uttaratantra.* It deals with the treatment of diseases caused by non-human beings, then with epilepsy (*apasmāra*) and insanity (*unmāda*). The supernatural beings who cause diseases are called Graha and classified in eight groups. Then Grahas are identified with Bhūtas.

देवास्तथा शत्रुगणाश्च तेषां गन्धर्वयक्षाः पितरो भुजङ्गाः ।
रक्षांसि या चापि पिशाचजातिरेषोऽष्टको देवगणो ग्रहाख्यः ॥
* * *
हिंसाविहारा ये केचिद्देवभावमुपाश्रिताः ॥
भूतानीति कृता संज्ञा तेषां संज्ञाप्रवक्तृभिः ।
ग्रहसंज्ञानि भूतानि यस्माद्वेत्त्यनया भिषक् ॥
विद्यया भूतविद्यात्वमत एव निरुच्यते ।

SuSam Uttaratantra LX.7, 26b–28a

The eight classes of supernatural beings called Graha are: Gods, the troops of their enemies, Gandharvas, Yakṣas, Fathers, Snakes, Rakṣas and Piśācas.

Those beings who divert themselves by injuring others have supernatural status; the name *bhūta* (neuter) has been created for them by the propounders of names. Because the physician knows the Bhūtas called Graha through this science, it is explained that it is the 'science of Bhūtas'.

Bhūta in the Sense of 'Material Element':

Speculation on the general structure of the universe started very early in Vedic culture. The concept of five elementary constituents of matter came gradually. It becomes manifest in the old Upaniṣads. For instance, the **Taittirīya**

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Upaniṣad describes different parts of the universe through a definite structure, called *saṃhitā* 'combination [of entities]' comprising a prior form and a latter form, their junction or articulation and what connects them (→*sandhi*, Vol. II). Considering the world and the luminaries it presents five elements:

> अथाधिलोकम् । पृथिवी पूर्वरूपम् । द्यौरुत्तररूपम् । आकाशः संधिः । वायुः संधानम् । इत्यधिलोकम् । अथाधिज्यौतिषम् । अग्निः पूर्वरूपम् । आदित्य उत्तररूपम् । आपः संधिः । वैद्युतः संधानम् । इत्यधिज्यौतिषम् ।
>
> TUp I.3
>
> Now, with regard to the world–
> The earth is the prior form; the heaven the latter form. Space is their conjunction; wind, the connection. Thus with regard to the world.
> Now, with regard to the luminaries–
> Fire is the prior form, the sun, the latter form. Water is their conjunction; lightning, the connection. Thus with regard to the luminaries. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

As an object for meditation these *Saṃhitās*, qualified as *mahā-Saṃhitās* 'great combinations', are considered to be Upaniṣads. In such a context the **Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka** introduces the concept of five *mahābhūtas* which, joined with other minor entities, form the *sarvabhūtasaṃhitā* "combination of all created things":

> पञ्चेमानि महाभूतानि भवन्तीति ह स्माह वालिशिखायनिः पृथिवी वायुराकाशमापो ज्योतींषि तानि मिथः संहितानि भवन्त्यथ यान्यन्यानि क्षुद्राणि महाभूतैः संधीयन्ते सैषा सर्वभूतसंहिता ।
>
> ŚāṅkhĀr VII.22
>
> Vāliśikhāyani says: "There are five vital elements. These are earth, wind, space, water and fire. These are the combinations jointly or together. And other minute elements, which are united with the vital elements are the combination of all created beings". (Based on the tr. by S. Chattopadhyay)

This is a remarkable example of an early attempt at creating a general concept of matter in Indian philosophy. The word *bhūta* refers to individual things which are numerous and of multifarious nature. These Vedic texts isolated a few major entities the importance of which in the natural world is obvious, earth and heaven separated by space and connected by wind; fire and sun joined by lightning, with rains in between. Among these entities five are qualified as *mahat* 'great': earth, wind, space, water and fire. It should be noted that the last

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two elements are designated by plural words *āpaḥ* 'waters' (→*ap*) and *jyotīṃṣi* 'lights' (→*jyotis*); the representation is half way between the sensible objects and the abstract concept. The same series with the same name appears in a description of the body of the living being described as the seat of the self:

> एष ब्रह्मा । एष इन्द्रः । एष प्रजापतिः । एते सर्वे देवाः । इमानि च पञ्च-महाभूतानि पृथिवी वायुराकाश आपो ज्योतींष्येतानीमानि च क्षुद्रमिश्राणीव बीजान्तराणि चेतराणि चाण्डजानि च जरायुजानि च स्वेदजानि चोद्भिज्जानि चाश्वा गावः पुरुषा हस्तिनो यत्किंचेदं प्राणि जङ्गमं च पतत्रि च यच्च स्थावरम् । सर्वं तत्प्रज्ञानेत्रं । प्रज्ञाने प्रतिष्ठितम् ।
>
> AitUp III.3
>
> He [the Self] is Brahmā; he is Indra; he is Prajāpati; [he is] all these Gods; and these five gross elements, namely earth, wind, space, water, light, these things and those which are mingled of the fine, as it were, origins of one sort and another: those born from an egg and those born from a womb, and those born from sweat, and those born from a sprout; horses, cows, persons, elephants; whatever breathing thing there is here – whether moving or flying, and what is stationary. All this is guided by intelligence, is based on intelligence. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

Buddhist thought which rose and grew under some remarkable influences of Upaniṣadic speculations knows the concept of *mahābhūta*. Etymological explanations of the word are found in the **Visuddhimagga**:

> महत्ता भूतत्ता चा ति, एतानि हि महन्तानि महता वायमेन परिग्गहेतब्बत्ता, भूतानि विज्जमानत्ता ति, महत्ता भूतत्ता च महाभूतानि । एवं सब्बा पेता धातुयो महन्तपातुभावादीहि कारणेहि महाभूतानि ।
> तत्थ भूतरूपं चतुब्बिधं – पथवीधातु, आपोधातु, तेजोधातु, वायोधातू ति ।
>
> ViMag Niddesa 11.103, Niddesa 14.35
>
> Because they are great and because they are entities, great because they are thoroughly grasped with great effort, entities because they are existent, because they are thus great and entities they are *mahābhūtas*.
>
> Here the appearance of elements is of four kinds: earth element, water element, fire element, and wind element.

There are two original features in Buddhism. The words *bhūta* and *mahābhūta* are used with reference to the elements in Buddhist scriptures. However, preference is given to the word (→*dhātu*, Vol. IV). The *dhātu* is something

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which is basic, elemental. Therefore it is explained as the principle behind the individual objects. Another original feature of Buddhism is that it gives a list of four elements, excluding *ākāśa*. It does not ignore the concept of space, but enters it in a list of six *dhātus* with *vijñāna*. Mind is included in the list of material elements, as in Indian philosophy in general the whole psychism is frequently held as being a special transformation of matter, different from the gross elements, but really of material nature, a subtle aspect of matter in continuity with the gross aspects. Mind and space may have been removed from the shorter list by Buddhist thinkers, because of their non-substantial nature.

These elements are connected with the functions of the sense organs, as described in the **Śikṣāsamuccaya**:

> षड्धातुरयं...पुरुषः...कतमे षट्? तद्यथा पृथिवीधातुरब्धातुस्तेजोधातुर्वायुधातुराकाशधातुर्विज्ञानधातुश्च ।
>
> ŚikSamu 244.11ff.
>
> This being is made of six elements.... What are they? The element of earth, the element of water, the element of fire, the element of wind, the element of space and the element of mind.

The great treatise of Vasubandhu gives more details about the specific properties and functions of the four elements:

> भूतानि पृथिवीधातुरप्तेजोवायुधातवः ।
> धृत्यादिकर्मसंसिद्धाः खरस्नेहोष्णतेरणाः ॥
>
> इत्येते चत्वारः स्वलक्षणोपादाय रूपधारणाद्धातवश्चत्वारि महाभूतानि उच्यन्ते । महत्त्वमेषां सर्वान्यरूपाश्रयत्वेनौदारिकत्वात् । अथवा तदुद्भूत-वृत्तिषु पृथिव्यप्तेजोवायुस्कन्धेष्वेषां महासंनिवेशत्वात् । ते पुनरेते धातवः कस्मिन्कर्मणि संसिद्धाः किंस्वभावाश्च? इत्याह – धृतिसंग्रहपक्तिव्यूहनकर्मस्वेते यथाक्रमं संसिद्धाः पृथिव्यप्तेजोवायुधातवः । व्यूहनं पुनर्वृद्धिः प्रसर्पणं च वेदितव्यम् । इदमेषां कर्म । स्वभावस्तु यथाक्रमम् । खरः पृथिवीधातुः । स्नेहोऽब्धातुः । उष्णता तेजोधातुः । ईरणा वायुधातुः । ईर्यतेऽनया भूतस्रोतो देशान्तरोत्पादनात्प्रदीपेरणवदितीरणा ॥
>
> AbhidhKoBh I.12, p.8
>
> The elements are the elementary earth, water, fire and wind. They are established by their functions, supporting etc.. They are endowed with solidity, unctuosity, heat and impulse.
>
> These four are *dhātus* [lit. 'supporting agents'] because they support the appearances on the basis of their own specific character. They are called "the four *mahābhūtas*". Their greatness comes from their vastness, because they are the supports of all other appearances, or

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because there is a great composition of them in the aggregates of [manifested] earth, water, fire and wind, in which their activity is manifested.

Now in which functions are these elements respectively established and what is their specific nature? The *kārikā* answers: the elements earth, water, fire and wind are established in the functions of supporting, cohesion, cooking and expanding respectively. *Vyūhana* should be understood as increasing and setting into motion. That is their function. Their specific nature is respectively as follows: the element earth is solid; the element water is unctuosity; the element fire is heat; the element wind is impulse. *Īraṇā* is that by which the flow of things is set into action, because [movement] creates a new place for them, like the impulse [of light] by a lamp.

Sound and the sense of hearing have their place in the system of six elements. In a system of four it is told that it is produced by the four primary elements which are all present in every elementary particle of matter:

अस्ति हि इन्द्रियाविनिर्भागी शब्दोऽपि य उपात्तमहाभूतहेतुकः । कथमिहाविनिर्भागे भूतानां कश्चिदेव संघातः कठिन उत्पद्यते, कश्चिदेव द्रव उष्णो वा समुदीरणो वा । यद्यत्र पटुतमं प्रभावत उद्भूतं तस्य तत्र उपलब्धिः । सूची तुलीकलापस्पर्शवत् सक्तुलवणचूर्णरसवच्च । कथं पुनस्तेषु शेषास्तित्वं गम्यते? कर्मतः संग्रहधृतिपक्तिव्यूहनात् ।

AbhidhKoBh II.22, p.53

Sound which is produced by the elements that form part of the organism does not exist independently of the organs. – If the [four] primary elements are never dissociated, [but coexist in every aggregate or molecule], how is it that one aggregate has solidity, another viscosity, or heat, or movement? – One perceives in any given aggregate the element which, being very active, has got prominence in it, like the touch of a needle in a tuft of grass and the taste of salt powder in flour. – How does one know the existence of the other elements in the aggregates [where only a prominent one is perceived]? – It is known from their action, respectively cohesion, support, cooking, expansion.

The Jainas are close to the Buddhists as they retain only four elements of matter and classify space apart, but they place them in a very original view of the world. They consider a series of five substances, soul, matter, cause of movement (*dharma*), cause of cessation of movement (*adharma*) and space

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(*ākāśa*), to which time is to be added. Matter is called *pudgala*. Its structure is atomic. Each atom is endowed with one of five tastes, one of two smells, one of six colours and two of eight touches. There are rules of composition of atoms to form aggregates (*skandha*). Thus *pudgala* is defined as *aṇavaḥ skandhāś ca* "the atoms and the aggregates" (TaSū V.25). The concept of four *bhūtas* is related to the *pudgala* by the fact that the atom takes its properties from them. *Ākāśa* is not counted with the four *bhūtas*, being incorporeal and having no specific sensible quality. Its function is only to give a location to other beings. *Śabda* is not a property of *ākāśa*, but is rather a particular transformation of the *pudgalas* belonging to the physical groupings of the form of speech and as such is endowed with four qualities, touch etc. (TaSū V.24).

In the context of meditation, the colours and shapes of the four elements are given:

अग्गि तिकोणो रत्तो किण्हो य पहंजणो तहा वित्तो ।
चउकोणं पिय पुहवी सेय जलं सुद्धचंदाभं ॥

अग्निः त्रिकोणः रक्तः, कृष्णश्च प्रभञ्जनस्तथावृत्तः ।
चतुष्कोणं पीतं पृथ्वी, श्वेतं जलं शुद्धचन्द्राभम् ॥

ṆāSā 57

Fire is triangular and red, air is circular and black, earth is quadrangular and yellow, water is clear like moon and white in colour. (Tr. Sadananda)

Excepting these two schools of thought, Indian philosophy has adopted a standard list of five elements:

पृथिव्यापस्तेजो वायुराकाशमिति भूतानि ।

NySū I.1.13

The elements are earth, water, fire, wind, space.

According to the Naiyāyikas, the definition of a *bhūta* 'element' is *bahirindriyagrāhyaviśeṣaguṇavattva* 'the fact to have a specific property grasped by an external sense organ'. This concept, as analyzed by Annaṃbhaṭṭa in his **Tarkadīpikā** 14, is clearly differentiated from corporeality (*mūrtatva*) which is defined as *paricchinnaparimāṇavattva* "the property to have a limited size" and *kriyāśrayatva* "the property to be the seat of actions". From this point of view there are four *mūrtadravyas* 'corporeal substances', namely earth, water, fire and wind, to which *manas* 'mind' is added and there are five *bhūtadravyas* which are these four with *ākāśa* 'space'. This analysis is not very far from the

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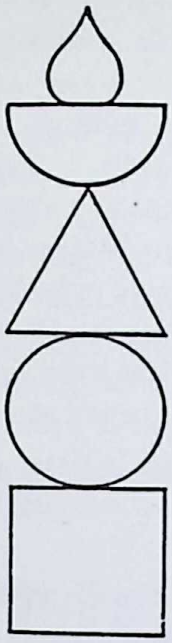

Figure 7: The *Stūpa* of the Five Elements symbolized by five shapes

Buddhist one. In the Nyāya representation, elements are linked to the external sense organs and to a set of properties:

> घ्राणरसनचक्षुस्त्वक्श्रोत्राणीन्द्रियाणि भूतेभ्यः ॥
> गन्धरसरूपस्पर्शशब्दाः पृथिव्यादिगुणास्तदर्थाः ॥
>
> NySū I.1.12,14
>
> Nose, tongue, eye, skin and ear are the sense organs produced from elements. The properties of the elements, i.e. smell, taste, colour, touch and sound, are the objects of the sense organs.

The words *ghrāṇa* lit. 'nose' etc. refer to the seats of the sense organs and also to the sense organs themselves. A sense organ (→*indriya*) is conceived as material and as being of the same matter as one of the five elements. Therefore it is able to grasp the specific property of the element it is made of. In the Nyāya school each element has got one specific property, which is not shared with any other: earth has smell for its specific property, water has taste, fire has colour, wind has touch, space has sound.

A particular standpoint of the Vaiśeṣika school is that only four *bhūtas* are created, space being held as eternal. This is rather an exceptional assertion, since the five *bhūtas* are generally considered as produced from a material cause, as is indicated by the etymology of the word itself. Praśastapāda says:

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चतुर्णां महाभूतानां सृष्टिसंहारविधिरुच्यते ॥

VaiśSūBh (Sṛṣṭi-Saṃhāra-prakaraṇam) p.121

We are now going to describe the process of the creation and destruction of the four ultimate material substances. (Tr. G.N. Jha)

This implies that there is no creation and destruction of *ākāśa*. It is also directly asserted by Annaṃbhaṭṭa:

शब्दगुणमाकाशम् । तच्चैकं विभु नित्यम् ।

TarkSaṅg 14

Space has sound as property. It is unique, all-pervading and eternal. The eternity of space is deduced from its pervasiveness (see Tarkadīpikā).

The Sāṃkhya school is characterized by a transformationist view. Its conception is that of an original, eternal, non-differentiated matter called →*prakṛti* lit. 'base' which is subjected to a process of transformation, firstly in the fundamental constituents of psychism, *mahat* and *ahaṃkāra*, then in the constituents of sensibility, finally in the elements of external objects:

प्रकृतेर्महांस्ततोऽहंकारस्तस्माद्गणश्च षोडशकः ।
तस्मादपि षोडशकात्पञ्चभ्यः पञ्च भूतानि ॥

प्रकृतिरव्यक्तं ... एकादशेन्द्रियाणि ... तन्मात्राणि च पञ्च; सोऽयं षोडशसंख्यापरिमितो गणः षोडशकः । तस्मादपि षोडशकादपकृष्टेभ्यः पञ्चभ्यस्तन्मात्रेभ्यः पञ्च भूतानि आकाशादीनि ।तत्र शब्दतन्मात्रादाकाशं शब्दगुणं, शब्दतन्मात्रसहितात्स्पर्शतन्मात्राद्वायुः शब्दस्पर्शगुणः, शब्दस्पर्शतन्मात्रसहितादूपतन्मात्रात् तेजः शब्दस्पर्शरूपगुणं, शब्दस्पर्शरूपतन्मात्रसहिताद्रसतन्मात्रादापः शब्दस्पर्शरूपरसगुणाः, शब्दस्पर्शरूपरसतन्मात्रसहिताद्गन्धतन्मात्राच्छब्दस्पर्शरूपरसगन्धगुणा पृथिवी जायत इत्यर्थः ॥

SāṃKā 22 with TaKau

From *prakṛti* comes *mahat*, from *mahat* comes *ahaṃkāra*, from which comes a group of sixteen; from five entities taken from that group of sixteen come the five elements.

Prakṛti is the non-differentiated; ... the group measured by the number sixteen is the eleven organs and the five *tanmātras*; from the five lowest items taken from the sixteen, i.e. the five *tanmātras* come the five *bhūtas ākāśa* etc.. From the *tanmātra* sound comes space whose property is sound; from the *tanmātra* touch accompanied by the *tanmātra* sound comes wind whose properties are sound and touch;

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from the *tanmātra* colour accompanied by the *tanmātras* sound and touch comes fire whose properties are colour, touch and sound; from the *tanmātra* taste accompanied by the *tanmātras* sound, touch and colour comes water whose properties are taste, colour, touch and sound; from the *tanmātra* smell accompanied by the *tanmātras* sound, touch, colour and taste comes earth whose properties are smell, taste, colour, touch and sound.

In order to describe the link between sense organs and elements the Sāṃkhya school has developed the concept of *tanmātra*. The properties of elements are specified with particular qualities which share something common between themselves; there are different sounds of numerous pitches, volumes, tempi etc., but which have the property of being a sound; that which is the mere general sound, is called *tanmātra* 'only that'. This *tanmātra* is considered as a state of matter in the cycle of transformation. It is subtle and is subject to a further transformation into a gross element. The scheme of transformation is such that the elements are issued from one or more *tanmātras* and have one or more of the corresponding properties. The following chart indicates the number of *tanmātras* producing each element and the number of corresponding properties of each one.

tanmātra	ākāśa	vāyu	tejas	ap	pṛthivī
śabda	*				
sparśa	*	*			
rūpa	*	*	*		
rasa	*	*	*	*	
gandha	*	*	*	*	*

The link between the *tanmātras* and the *bhūtas*, the fact that the *tanmātras* are the generic principles of the properties of the elements and the fact that they bear the same name as their properties have introduced the usage to call the *tanmātras sūkṣma-bhūtas* 'subtle elements'. The **Yuktidīpikā** on **Sāṃkhya-Kārikā** 22, even declares that the elements were originally called *mahābhūtas* and that *bhūta* is the name of *tanmātras*. This is, indeed, a rare usage, but it has to be compared with a passage of the **Maitrāyaṇī Upaniṣad** which extends the application of the word *bhūta* to the *tanmātras* also, in the context of an explanation of the concept *bhūtātman* equated with the material body in which the soul gets incarnated:

पञ्च तन्मात्राणि भूतशब्देनोच्यन्ते । अथ पञ्च महाभूतानि भूतशब्देनोच्यन्ते । अथ तेषां यत् समुदयं तच्छरीरमित्युक्तम् । अथ यो ह खलु वाव शरीरमित्युक्तं स भूतात्मेत्युक्तम् ।

MaitUp III.2

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> The five subtile substances are spoken of by the word 'element'. Likewise, the five gross elements are spoken of by the word 'element'. Now, the combination of these is said to be 'the body'. Now, he, assuredly, indeed, who is said to be in 'the body', is said to be 'the elemental soul'. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

In the transformationist conception of the Sāṃkhyas the nature of the elements and the *tanmātras* is described as conditioned by the aspects of their material cause, the *ahaṃkāra* or principle of individuation. *Ahaṃkāra* is one, but it has different evolutes due to the prominence of different *guṇas*, and accordingly it receives different technical names, as shown by Īśvarakṛṣṇa:

> सात्त्विक एकादशकः प्रवर्तते वैकृतादहंकारात् ।
> भूतादेस्तन्मात्रः स तामसस्तैजसाद्उभयम् ॥
>
> SāṃKā 25

> From the *ahaṃkāra vaikṛta* 'subject to transformation' starts the group of eleven (organs of knowledge and action) with prominent *sattva*; from the *ahaṃkāra bhūtādi* 'origin of elements' starts the group of *tanmātras* with prominent *tamas*; from the *ahaṃkāra taijasa* 'luminous' both start.

It is already clear that the elements have been conceptualized in close relation with the representation of human sensibility. This way of thinking has been followed by the Yoga philosophy of Patañjali. The **Yoga-Sūtra** proposes a dualistic view in which the soul or pure subject is the witness of the object. The soul is the *draṣṭṛ* 'experiencer' and the world is nothing else than the *dṛśya* 'the object seen' which is defined thus:

> प्रकाशक्रियास्थितिशीलं भूतेन्द्रियात्मकं भोगापवर्गार्थं दृश्यम् ॥
> ... तदेतद् दृश्यं भूतेन्द्रियात्मकं भूतभावेन पृथिव्यादिना सूक्ष्मस्थूलेन परिणमते ।
>
> YSūBh II.18

> The seen [objective domain] is endowed with light, action, inertia, is made of elements and sense organs, and has a purpose, namely [the subject's] experience and liberation.
>
> That seen [objective domain] is made of elements and sense organs, i.e. is transformed into the form of elements, as earth etc., gross and subtle.

We have to note here that neither Patañjali, nor his commentator Vyāsa mention the *tanmātras*. They speak only of two forms of the elements, subtle and gross. They present them also as being the three *guṇas, sattva, rajas, tamas*,

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mentioned here through their functions (→*guṇa*). The *guṇas* are the constitutive substances of *prakṛti* and remain present in all the transformations of that primordial matter. There are four stages of transformation which Patañjali calls *viśeṣa* 'particularized', *aviśeṣa* 'non-particularized', *liṅgamātra* 'only-sign', *aliṅga* 'non-sign' (YSū 19). Vyāsa identifies the elements as the particularized forms of the *tanmātras* which are non-particularized. The difference between these two stages of matter is also described with the concept of subtle material cause and gross products.

Yogic thought considers matter as being in perpetual transformation. Patañjali gives a few hints on his concept of transformation. After a description of the transformation of psychism, he extends the same concept to the elements and sense organs:

एतेन भूतेन्द्रियेषु धर्मलक्षणावस्थापरिणामा व्याख्याताः ॥

YSū III.13

Thus in the case of elements and sense organs transformations of essential attributes, of [temporal] characters and of states are described.

Transformation concerns three aspects: a lump of clay is made into a pot, this is the change of essential attribute or form (*dharma*); the lump of clay has got the character of past and the form of pot the character of present, this is the change of temporal character (*lakṣaṇa*); the present pot itself undergoes several states, new, old etc., this is the change of state (*avasthā*). A consequence of this conception is the idea that the yogic course of meditation (*saṃyama*, i.e. *dhāraṇā, dhyāna* and *samādhi*) on the three transformations procures the knowledge of past and future (YSū III.16). In the same manner Patañjali proposes a *saṃyama* on five aspects of the elements in order to acquire mastery over them:

स्थूलस्वरूपसूक्ष्मान्वयार्थवत्त्वसंयमाद्भूतजयः ॥

तत्र पार्थिवाद्याः शब्दादयो विशेषाः सहकारादिभिर्धर्मैः स्थूलशब्देन परिभाषिताः । एतद्भूतानां प्रथमं रूपम् । द्वितीयं रूपं स्वसामान्यं मूर्तिर्भूमिः स्नेहो जलं वह्निरुष्णता वायुः प्रणामी सर्वतोगतिराकाश इत्येतत्स्वरूपशब्देनोच्यते । ... अथ किमेषां सूक्ष्मरूपं, तन्मात्रं भूतकारणं, तस्यैकोऽवयवः परमाणुः सामान्यविशेषात्माऽयुतसिद्धावयवभेदानुगतः समुदाय इत्येवं सर्वतन्मात्राणि । एतत्तृतीयम् । अथ भूतानां चतुर्थं रूपं ख्यातिक्रियास्थितिशीला गुणाः कार्यस्वभावानुपातिनोऽन्वयशब्देनोक्ताः । अथैषां पञ्चमं रूपमर्थवत्त्वं, भोगापवर्गार्थता गुणेष्वेवान्वयिनी, गुणास्तन्मात्रभूतभौतिकेष्विति सर्वमर्थवत् ।

YSūBh III.43

From *saṃyama* on the gross form, the essence, the subtle form, the

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recurrence [of the *guṇas*] and the finality comes the victory over the elements.

In this [system of Yoga] the particularised objects, sound etc., which belong to the elements, earth etc., with their essential constituents, generic form etc. are technically designated by the word *sthūla* 'gross'. That is the first aspect of the elements. The second aspect, namely the common feature, consistence defining earth, unctuosity defining water, heat defining fire, moving power defining wind (*vāyu*), pervasiveness defining space, all that is mentioned by the word *svarūpa*... Now what is the subtle aspect? That is the *tanmātra*, material cause of the element. The single part of the element is the minutest atom, which is an aggregate made of a common matter and differentiated matters, linked to the difference of integrated parts. Similarly with all the *tanmātras*. This is the third aspect. Now the fourth aspect of the elements, namely the *guṇas* whose functions are knowledge, activity and inertia, which are recurrent in the nature of the evolutes and expressed by the word *anvaya* 'recurrence'. Now their fifth aspect is their finality, namely the property, belonging to the *guṇas*, to have experience and liberation as a purpose. And the *guṇas* are recurrent in the *tanmātras*, the elements and the things made of the elements. Thus all have the same purpose.

When dealing with the first aspect, the gross one, Vyāsa brings in two concepts, *viśeṣas* and *dharmas* of elements. The first is a particularized property of the element and the individual substance possessing that property, the fragrance and the fragrant substance for instance; it is distinguished from the *tanmātra* by being only a particular variety of the *tanmātra*. Commenting on this **Yoga-Sūtra** and Bhāṣya, Vācaspatimiśra and Vijñānabhikṣu give examples: for space the *tanmātra* is sound and the *viśeṣas* are musical notes, *ṣaḍja*, *gāndhāra* etc.; for wind the *tanmātra* is touch, the *viśeṣas* are cold, hot touch etc.; for fire the *tanmātra* is colour, the *viśeṣas* are black, yellow etc.; for water the *tanmātra* is taste, the *viśeṣas* are astringent, sweet taste, etc.; for earth the *tanmātra* is smell, the *viśeṣas* are fragrance, stench, etc.. The *dharma* is a constitutive property of an object made of an element. A versified list of *dharmas* for each element is quoted by Vācaspatimiśra and Vijñānabhikṣu in the same commentary; the source of this quotation is not known, it seems to be a standard list preserved in the oral tradition of the Yogic schools, and an ancient one, since it is alluded to by Vyāsa when he says *ākārādibhir dharmaiḥ* "the essential constituents, generic form etc.":

आकारो गौरवं रौक्ष्यं वरणं स्थैर्यमेव च ।

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वृत्तिर्भेदः क्षमा काष्ण्यं काठिन्यं सर्वभोग्यता ॥
स्नेहः सौक्ष्म्यं प्रभा शौक्ल्यं मार्दवं गौरवं च यत् ।
शैत्यं रक्षा पवित्रत्वं संधानं चौदका गुणाः ॥
ऊर्धभाक्पाचकं दग्धृ पावकं लघु भास्वरम् ।
प्रध्वंस्योजस्वि वै तेजः पूर्वाभ्यां भिन्नलक्षणम् ॥
तिर्यग्यानं पवित्रत्वमाक्षेपो नोदनं बलम् ।
चलमच्छायता रौक्ष्यं वायोर्धर्माः पृथग्विधाः ॥
सर्वतोगतिरव्यूहोऽविष्टम्भश्चेति ते त्रयः ।
आकाशधर्मा व्याख्याताः पूर्वधर्मविलक्षणाः ॥

Quoted in Vācaspatimiśra and Vijñānabhikṣu's Comm. on YSūBh and YSū III.44

[The constituents of particularized objects made of earth are] generic form, weight, harshness, creating obstacles, stability, location (capacity to support all objects), aptitude to break, endurance, blackness, hardness, being object of experience for all. The properties of [objects made of] water are: unctuosity, subtlety, shining, whiteness, softness, weight, coldness, giving protection (by covering etc.), purifying, holding together. Fire is going upwards, apt to cook, burn, purify, light, shining, destructive, vigorous and is thus differentiated from the previous elements. The differentiating properties of wind are oblique movement, aptitude to purify, drag, push, strength, mobility, having no shade, harshness. There are three properties of space, differentiating it from all previous elements, ubiquity, non-agglomeration, and non-obstruction.

Tāntric conceptions have a strong base in Sāṃkhya and Yoga doctrines. Their transformationist concept of matter is generally found in Tāntric literature, with a few variants. For instance, the Śaiva Siddhānta Tāntric school accepts the Sāṃkhya view of *ahaṃkāra*, but gives a slightly different classification and function of its three aspects:

तैजसो वैकृतो योऽन्यो भूतादिरिति संस्मृतः ।
तेभ्यः समात्रका देवा मात्रेभ्यो भूतपञ्चकम् ॥

MṛgĀ vp XII.2

[Ego] is revealed as 'luminous', 'subject to transformation' and 'origin of elements'. From these [three aspects] derive the sense organs together with the *tanmātras*. From the *tanmātras* derives the group of five elements.

This process of evolution is made explicit, in the same context, by Aghoraśivācārya in his commentary on Sadyojyoti's **Tattva-Saṅgraha**:

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तत्र मनसो बुद्धीन्द्रियाणां च सात्त्विकात्तैजसादहंकारस्कन्धादुत्पत्तिः, कर्मेन्द्रियाणां तु राजसाद्वैकारिकाख्यात्, भूतयोनीनां च तन्मात्राणां तामसाद्भूतादिसंज्ञात् । एवं त्रिबिधादहंकारादेषामुत्पत्तिः ।

TaSaṅg Laghuṭīkā *ad* 9

Mind and sense organs are born from the branch of *ahaṃkāra* called *taijasa* which is sāttvic, the organs of action are born from the branch called *vaikārika* which is rājasic, the *tanmātras* or matrices of the elements are born from the branch called *bhūtādi* which is tāmasic. In this way all these are born from the *ahaṃkāra* under its three aspects.

Specific qualities of elements are listed by the **Mṛgendra Āgama** as *avakāśa* 'place' for space, *dhūnana* 'agitation' for wind, *jvalana* 'flaming' for fire, *plāva* 'bathing' for water, *kharatva* 'solidity' for earth (MṛgĀ vp XII.20). Their functions are told to be *avakāśadāna* 'giving place' for space, *vyūha* 'assembling the parts of something' (*avayavaghaṭana* according to Aghoraśiva in TaSaṅg Laghuṭīkā) for wind, *pakti* 'cooking' for fire, *saṃgraha* 'joining' (according to Aghoraśiva, *ibid.*, *avaṣṭambha* 'resting on something' as a liquid takes the shape of its container) for water, *dhāraṇa* 'supporting' for earth (MṛgĀ vp XII.21cd–22ab; TaPrak I.62). With regard to the properties of the elements, sound etc. the sharing among the elements advocated by Sāṃkhya is accepted against the position of the Vaiśeṣikas (MṛgĀ vp XII.27cd–29; TaPrak I.61). Aghoraśiva gives an interesting description to support the Sāṃkhya view:

अत एवाश्रयादन्यत्रोपलब्धेराकाशैकगुणः शब्द इति यद्वैशेषिकादिभिरुक्तं तदयुक्तं तस्य हेतोः प्रत्यक्षागमबाधितत्वेन कालात्ययापदिष्टत्वात् । तथा हि प्रत्यक्षेणाकाशे प्रतिशब्दः श्रूयते । वायौ शकशकादिः । अग्नौ धमधमादिः । जले छलछलादिः । पृथिव्यां खटखटादिः । किं च भेर्याद्याश्रयेष्वपि शब्दा उपलभ्यन्ते ।

TaSaṅg Laghuṭīkā *ad* 2

It has been told by the Vaiśeṣikas etc. that sound is a property of only the element space, because it is perceived outside of the element which is its first support (the sound of a drum is perceived outside of the drum made of the element earth, therefore it does not pertain to that element). This is not proper, because the reason of this inference, being contradicted by direct perception and scriptures, is a fallacy. As a matter of fact echo is heard in the element space, the sound '*śakaśaka*' is heard in wind, the sound '*dhamadhama*' in fire, the sound '*chalachala*' in water, the sound '*khaṭakhaṭa*' in earth. And the sounds are perceived also in their first support such as the drum etc.

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Some Tāntric texts establish a hierarchy of the elements, with space at the top and earth at the bottom. The upper element is told to be the *vyāpaka* 'pervader' of the next lower one, and so on. Reversely the lower element is *vyāpya* 'pervaded by' the next upper one:

व्योम्नि मरुदत्र दहनस्तत्रापस्तासु संस्थिता पृथिवी ।
सचराचरात्मकानि तानि तस्यां जातानि सर्वभूतानि ॥

PSāT I.52

In space wind exists; in wind fire; in fire water; in water earth remains. In earth all beings, including mobile and immobile creatures, are born.

भूतं त्वधस्तनं व्याप्यं तद् गुणा व्यापकाश्रयाः ।
व्याप्येष्ववस्थिता देवि! स्थूलसूक्ष्मविभेदतः ॥

YoH II.35

The lower element is pervaded [by the upper one]. The properties belonging to the pervading element are situated in those that pervade, O Devī, in different forms, gross and subtle.

Antithetic, sympathetic or neutral relations between elements have been conceived by the **Mṛgendra Āgama** in the context of its description of a yogic exercise of *dhāraṇā* 'fixation' of the sensible elements. For instance, a yogin who suffers from thirst should mentally fix (*dhārayet*) the element water in his throat. In such exercises the yogin is advised to take into account the affinity or mutual exclusiveness of couples of elements, according to his aim. These mutual relations are as follows:

खं समस्तेषु भूतेषु वारिवायू शिखिक्षिती ॥
वार्यग्नी भूमिपवनौ वारिक्ष्मे अनलानिलौ ।
मध्यस्थारातिमित्राणि चतुष्के युग्मयुग्मशः ॥

MṛgĀ yp 42cd–43

Space is in all elements (and is friendly with all). Water and wind, fire and earth are neutral; water and fire, earth and wind are inimical; water and earth, fire and air are friendly.

In the same context, a colour, a geometrical figure and an emblem are ascribed to each element. The yogin has to fix mentally the element with these characters, in order to achieve definite purposes:

तानि हेमहिमज्योतिःकृष्णस्वच्छानि रूपतः ॥
वेद्यर्धमण्डलत्र्यस्रवृत्तपद्माकृतीनि तु ।

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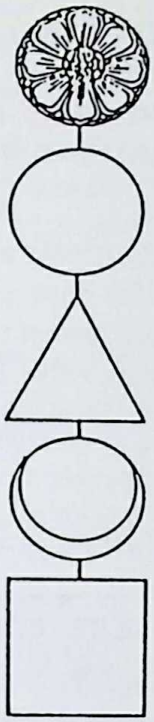

Figure 8: Symbolic forms of the elements according to Tantra

स्थैर्याप्यायनविस्रोषप्रेरणाशून्यताक्षये ॥
भवन्ति वज्रकज्वालाबिन्दुशून्यान्वितानि तु ।

MṛgĀ yp 36cd–38ab

These [elements, starting with earth] which are respectively yellow, white, bright, black and transparent in colour, which in shape are square, half moon, triangular, round and lotiform, which are marked with a *vajra*, a lotus, a flame, a dot and void, are used [in *dhāraṇā*] for the purpose of attaining steadiness, refreshment, burning, impelling and voidness. (Based on the tr. by H.N. Chakravarty)

element	colour	shape	emblem	purpose
earth	yellow	square	vajra	steadiness
water	white	half moon	lotus	refreshment
fire	bright	triangle	flame	burning
wind	black	circle	dot	impelling
space	transparent	lotus	void	voidness

Another kind of Tāntric speculation establishes relations between elements and phonemes:

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पञ्चभूतमयं विश्वं तन्मयी सा सदातनी ।
तन्मयी मूलविद्या च तदद्य कथयामि ते ॥
हकाराद्व्योम संभूतं ककारात्तु प्रभञ्जनः ।
रेफादग्निः सकाराच्च जलतत्त्वस्य संभवः ॥
लकारात्पृथिवी जाता तस्माद्विश्वमयी च सा ।

YoH II.28–30ab

The universe consists of five elements and the divine goddess herself is inherently present in it. The root *mantra* of her is made of her essence, I am telling this to you. From the phoneme *h* space emerged and from *k* wind was born, from *r* fire, from *s* the principle of water, from *l* earth. Therefore she is immanent in everything. (Based on the tr. by H.N. Chakravarty)

The **Īśānaśivagurudeva Paddhati** gives a different correspondence:

खानिलाग्न्यब्धरित्र्याख्या ह्यरेफा वलावपि ।
उपादानानि विश्वात्ममातृकायास्तु पञ्च वै ॥

ĪśGP I.1.62

Space, wind, fire, water and earth are denoted by the phonemes *h*, *y*, *r*, *v* and *l*. These five [phonemes] are the material causes of the universe in its form of *mātṛkā*. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

The idea of generation of the world from phonemes has been supported especially in the school of Vaiyākaraṇas and its thinkers who gave the supreme status to speech. About the generation of elements Nandikeśvara's **Kāśikā**, which is a commentary on the *akṣarasamāmnāya*, i.e. the list of phonemes ordered in fourteen *sūtras* said to have been revealed by Śiva to Pāṇini, says:

हयवरट् ॥
भूतपञ्चकमेतस्माद्धयवरण्महेश्वरात् ।
व्योमवाय्वम्बुवह्न्याख्यभूतान्यासीत्स एव हि ॥
हकाराद्व्योमसंज्ञश्च यकाराद्वायुरुच्यते ।
रकाराद्वह्निस्तोयं तु वकारादिति शैववाक् ॥

लण् ॥
आधारभूतं भूतानामन्नादीनां च कारणम् ।
अन्नादेतस्ततो जीवः कारणात्वाल्लणीरितम् ॥

Kāśikā of Nandikeśvara 15–17

'Ha Ya Va Raṭ' – A group of five is born from Maheśvara under the form of HYVR ṭ. The elements called space, wind, water, fire,

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indeed, were H only. From H derives the [element] called space, from Y wind is said to derive, from R fire, from V water. That is the speech revealed by Śiva.

'Laṇ' – The [element] which is the support of beings and the cause of food etc. – from food derives semen from which derives the living being –, because it is the cause [of beings], is revealed in [a separate *sūtra*] 'Laṇ'.

In astrology a correspondence is established between elements and planets. Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus and Saturn are respectively the rulers of fire, earth, space, water and wind (Bṛhajjātaka II.6). Consequently Varāha Mihira postulates correlations between a person's characteristics, starting from the elements, and the position of the planets in his sign:

सत्त्वमहीनं सूर्याच्छारीरं मानसं च चन्द्रबलात् ।
यद्राशिभेदयुक्तावेतौ तल्लक्षणः स पुमान् ॥
तद्धातुमहाभूतप्रकृतिद्युतिवर्णसत्त्वरूपाद्यैः ।
अबलरवीन्दुयुतैस्तैः संकीर्णा लक्षणैः पुरुषाः ॥

BṛSam LXIX.3–4

A person's characteristics depend upon the Lords of the Zodiacal Signs and their sub-divisions in which these two luminaries are stationed (as well as upon the planets with which they are conjoined). Persons will be blessed with the particular physical constituent, great element, nature, lustre, colour mettle, appearance etc. belonging to the planets owning the particular sub-divisions of signs occupied by them. When both the luminaries are weak in respect of the signs and sub-divisions, the characteristics would be of a mixed type. (Tr. M.R. Bhat)

The concept of five elements has a great importance in the ancient and traditional medicine of India. The body is considered to be made of the five elements. There is the idea of a continuity between the matter of the world and the matter of the human body. The same elements are constitutive of both, and their functions are the same in both. The wind is the force which moves the stars (SūrSiddh II.3, XII.73) and which is responsible for all physiological activities in the body. Classical Āyurveda has adopted the Sāṃkhya view of matter, its transformationist representation of creation and the concept of five elements (CarSam ŚāSthā I.27, 63; SuSam ŚāSthā I.4, 22). Embrylogical representations are also dependant upon this view and Caraka describes the formation of the embryo within the limits of the theory of transmigration:

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भूतैश्चतुर्भिः सहितः सुसूक्ष्मैर्मनोजवो देहमुपैति देहात् ।
कर्मात्मकत्वान्न तु तस्य दृश्यं दिव्यं विना दर्शनमस्ति रूपम् ॥

CarSam ŚāSthā II.31

The self along with four subtle *bhūtas* and with speed like that of mind transmigrate from one body to the other according to past deeds. It cannot be seen without divine sense. (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

The commentator Cakrapāṇi explains that the fifth element, space, is not mentioned in the description of transmigration, because it has no activity, no movement. The embryo itself is described thus:

गर्भस्तु खल्वन्तरिक्षवाय्वग्नितोयभूमिविकारश्चेतनाधिष्ठानभूतः । एवमनया युक्त्या पञ्चमहाभूतविकारसमुदायात्मको गर्भश्चेतनाधिष्ठानभूतः, स ह्यस्य षष्ठो धातुरुक्तः ।

CarSam ŚāSthā IV.6

Embryo is the product of *ākāśa, vāyu, tejas, ap* and *pṛthivī*, being the seat of consciousness. Thus, the embryo is the aggregate of the five *mahābhūtas* being the seat of the consciousness which is regarded as the sixth constituent of embryo. (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

However, Āyurveda, in accordance with the specificity of its object of study, the human body, has elaborated new specific definitions and technical denominations for the elements. The word *bhūta* is used often, but the word →*dhātu* is more common in Āyurvedic literature to designate the elements. The *dhātus* are the five *bhūtas* considered as basic principles or constituents of the body. Longer lists of *dhātus* are known, such as a list of seven anatomical components, primary fluid, blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow, semen (*rasa, asṛj, māṃsa, medas, asthi, majjā, śukra*); these are called only *dhātus*, not *bhūtas*. They are not the basic elements, but a set of secondary constituents made of the primary ones. A list of three *dhātus* is the most common one: *prāṇa, pitta* and *śleṣman* or *kapha*. They are considered as other names of the three *bhūtas*, wind, fire and water. The remaining *bhūtas*, space and earth, are also considered as components of the body, but are dissociated from the three others and did not receive a special treatment in medicine, because they do not play a specific role in physiology and in the theory of diseases. The three major elements are the main object of study in the medical theory and have thus received the collective name of *tridhātu*. They are also called *tridoṣa* "the three sources of disease". They are basic constituents in the state of health, but in case of disorder they become the root causes of alterations in the secondary *dhātus* and of diseases. Their disorder is the excitement (*kopana*) or weakness of one or of a combination (*sannipāta*) of them.

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The element wind is well-known as having five forms called *prāṇas* and five functions in the body (→*prāṇa*, Vol. I). Similarly the other elements have been conceived as having five forms:

> त्वक् मांसं दन्ता नखा अस्थीनि इति पञ्चगुणं कठिनं देहगतं पृथिवीतत्त्वम् । रसः रक्तं कफः वसा मेद इति पञ्चधा जलतत्त्वम् । क्रोधस्तथा मुखभाः - मुखगतं तेजस्तथा कायोष्मा नेत्राग्निः - चक्षुर्गतं प्रकाशकं तेजः, जाठरोऽग्निश्च इति पञ्चधा तेजस्तत्त्वम् । तथा प्राणाः - प्राणापानसमानोदानव्यानाः पञ्च वायवः ... तच्च पञ्चधा वायुतत्त्वम् । तथा जठरमुखश्रोत्रहृदयनासिकागत आकाशः पञ्चधा नभस्तत्त्वम् । इत्थंविभागेन शरीरे पञ्चशः पञ्च भूतानि ।
>
> MNPrak II.7–8
>
> The element of earth abides in the body in solid form with five characteristic divisions: skin, flesh, teeth, nails and bones. Fluid, blood, phlegm, marrow and fat, this is the five-fold element of water. Anger, brightness of the face, warmth of the body, light in the eyes – that is the fire which abides in the eye and illumines, digestive fire, this is the five-fold element of fire. *Prāṇas* – namely the five winds, *prāṇa, apāna, samāna, udāna, vyāna*, this is the five-fold element of wind. The space connected with the stomach, the mouth, the ear, the heart, the nostrils, is the five-fold element of space. Thus the five elements remain in the body in five different ways. (Based on the tr. by H.N. Chakravarty)

Epic and Purāṇic literature contains many references to the same Sāṃkhya concepts of five elements with the peculiar sharing of properties, their functions etc. (ViPur I.2.36, 49b-50a; ŚPur VI.17.15–17, 25–27; VDhPur II.115.2–5; BhāgPur III.26.12ab; AgPur 59.14b–15a). It has also references to the concept of elements in the body (MBh XII.177.4, 212.8; ViPur VI.7.12, 18), for example:

> तस्य भूमिमयो देहः श्रोत्रमाकाशसम्भवम् ।
> सूर्यश्चक्षुरसुर्वायुरब्यस्तु खलु शोणितम् ॥
>
> MBh XII.267.11
>
> His (creature's) body is made of earth, his ear is born of space; his eye is the Sun, his breath is wind and his blood derives from water. (Based on the tr. by M.N. Dutt)

The Tāntric view of the human body, though it is very original in many respects, has integrated the idea of a composition of the five elements. For instance:

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देहेऽस्थिमांसकेशत्वङ्नखदन्तेषु चावनिः ।
मूत्ररक्तकफस्वेदशुक्रादौ वारि संस्थितम् ॥
हृदि पक्तौ दृशोः पित्ते तेजस्तद्धर्मदर्शनात् ।
प्राणादिवृत्तिभेदेन नभस्वानुक्त एव ते ॥
गर्ववृत्त्यनुषङ्गेण खं समस्तासु नाडिषु ।

MṛgĀ vp XII.30–32ab

Earth remains in the body in the form of bone, flesh, hair, skin, nails and teeth. Water remains in it in the form of urine, blood, phlegm, perspiration and semen. In the heart, in digestion, in the eyes, in bile fire is present, because its functions are perceived there. You have stated earlier that wind is present through the different functions of *prāṇa* etc. Space exists in all the channels in close association with the Ego. (Based on the tr. by H.N. Chakravarty)

Epics and Purāṇas contributed to the development of the concept of *bhūtas* in a more original manner, when they integrated the abstract notions in mythological narratives. An important myth connects the elements with the body of a deity. The elements are five out of the eight *mūrtis* or 'forms' of Śiva:

तस्य देवादिदेवस्य मूर्त्यष्टकमयं जगत् ।
तस्मिन्व्याप्य स्थितं विश्वं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव ॥
शर्वो भवस्तथा रुद्र उग्रो भीमः पशोः पतिः ।
ईशानश्च महादेवो मूर्तयश्चाष्ट विश्रुताः ॥
भूम्यम्भोऽग्निमरुद्व्योमक्षेत्रज्ञार्कनिशाकराः ।
अधिष्ठिता महेशस्य शर्वाद्यैरष्टमूर्तिभिः ॥
चराचरात्मकं विश्वं धत्ते विश्वंभरात्मिका ।
शार्वी शर्वाह्वया मूर्तिरिति शास्त्रस्य निश्चयः ॥
संजीवनं समस्तस्य जगतः सलिलात्मिका ।
भावीति गीयते मूर्तिर्भवस्य परमात्मनः ॥
बहिरन्तर्गताद्विश्वं व्याप्य तेजोमयी शुभा ।
रौद्री रुद्राव्यया मूर्तिरास्थिता घोररूपिणी ॥
स्पन्दयत्यनिलात्मेदं बिभर्ति स्पन्दते स्वयम् ।
औग्रीति कथ्यते सद्भिर्मूर्तिरुग्रस्य वेधसः ॥
सर्वावकाशदा सर्वव्यापिका गगनात्मिका ।
मूर्तिर्भीमस्य भीमाख्या भूतवृन्दस्य भेदिका ॥
सर्वात्मनामधिष्ठात्री सर्वक्षेत्रनिवासिनी ।
मूर्तिः पशुपतेर्ज्ञेया पशुपाशनिकृन्तनी ॥
दीपयन्ती जगत्सर्वं दिवाकरसमाह्वया ।
ईशानाख्या महेशस्य मूर्तिर्दिवि विसर्पति ॥
आप्याययति यो विश्वममृतांशुर्निशाकरः ।
महादेवस्य सा मूर्तिर्महादेवसमाह्वया ॥

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आत्मा तस्याष्टमी मूर्तिः शिवस्य परमात्मनः ।
व्यापिकेतरमूर्तीनां विश्वं तस्माच्छिवात्मकम् ॥

* * *

अष्टमूर्त्यात्मना विश्वमधिष्ठाय स्थितं शिवम् ।
भजस्व सर्वभावेन रुद्रं परमकारणम् ॥

ŚPur VII.2.3.17–28, 33

The universe consists of eight *mūrtis* of the primordial Lord of gods, wherein lies stretched the universe, as the gems and beads in the string. These famous eight *mūrtis* are Śarva, Bhava, Rudra, Ugra, Bhīma, Paśupati, Īśāna and Mahādeva. The earth, water, fire, wind, space, soul, the sun and the moon are presided over by the eight *mūrtis* Śarva etc; of the lord. This is the conclusion of the Scriptures that the *mūrti* of Śarva in the form of the earth upholds the universe consisting of the mobile and immobile beings. The *mūrti* of Bhava, the great Ātman, in the form of water enlivens the universe. The *mūrti* of Rudra having a terrible form, is stationed all over the universe internally and externally and it consists of fire. The *mūrti* of Ugra in the form of the wind throbs itself and sustains everything and makes everything throb. The *mūrti* of Bhīma is in the form of the space. It splits the elements. It is all-pervasive and gives space to everything. The *mūrti* of Paśupati is the presiding deity of the Ātmans, immanent in the souls and splitting the binding cords of the Paśus. The *mūrti* of Maheśa named Īśāna, otherwise called the sun, illuminates the universe and moves about in the firmament. The *mūrti* of Mahādeva is the cause of the moon who delights and nourishes the universe with his nectarine rays. The eighth *mūrti* of the supreme lord Śiva is the Ātman. It pervades all the *mūrtis*. Hence the universe has Śiva as its Ātman.

With pious emotions worship Śiva who presides over the universe in the form of *Aṣṭamūrti* Rudra, the great cause. (Tr. J.L. Shastri)

Purāṇic culture is composite and freely integrates data from the Vedas and Tantras. The same **Śiva Purāṇa** presents another view of the world as emanated from the five faces of Sadāśiva. Thus the five faces, which are also the basic *mantras* of Śaiva rituals, are considered in correspondence with the soul, *prakṛti* and all is evolutes, psychism, organs of action and knowledge, subtle and gross elements:

ईशानः पुरुषो घोरो वामसंज्ञस्तथैव च ।
ब्रह्मसंज्ञो महेशस्य मूर्तयः पञ्च विश्रुताः ॥

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ईशानः शिवरूपश्च गरीयान्प्रथमः स्मृतः ।
भोक्तारं प्रकृतेः साक्षात्क्षेत्रज्ञमधितिष्ठति ॥
शैवस्तत्पुरुषाख्यश्च स्वरूपो हि द्वितीयकः ।
गुणाश्रयात्मकं भोग्यं सर्वज्ञमधितिष्ठति ॥
धर्माय स्वाङ्गसंयुक्तं बुद्धितत्त्वं पिनाकिनः ।
अघोराख्यस्वरूपो यस्तिष्ठत्यन्तस्तृतीयकः ॥
वामदेवाह्वयो रूपश्चतुर्थः शंकरस्य हि ।
अहंकृतेरधिष्ठानो बहुकार्यकरः सदा ॥
ईशानाह्वस्वरूपो हि शंकरस्येश्वरः सदा ।
श्रोत्रस्य वचसश्चापि विभोर्व्योम्नस्तथैव च ॥
त्वक्पाणिस्पर्शवायूनामीश्वरं रूपमैश्वरम् ।
पुरुषाख्यं विचारज्ञा मतिमन्तः प्रचक्षते ॥
वपुषश्च रसस्यापि रूपस्याग्नेस्तथैव च ।
अघोराख्यमधिष्ठानं रूपमाहुर्मनीषिणः ॥
रसनायाश्च पायोश्च रसस्यापां तथैव च ।
ईश्वरं वामदेवाख्यं स्वरूपं शांकरं स्मृतम् ॥
घ्राणस्य चैवोपस्थस्य गन्धस्य च भुवस्तथा ।
सद्योजाताह्वयं रूपमीश्वरं शांकरं विदुः ॥
इमे स्वरूपाः शंभोर्हि वन्दनीयाः प्रयत्नतः ।
श्रेयोऽर्थिभिर्नरैर्नित्यं श्रेयसामेकहेतवः ॥

ŚPur III.1.39–49

Īśāna, Puruṣa, Ghora (or Aghora), Vāma, Brahman are the five names and forms of Maheśa. Īśāna is the first and most revered form of Śiva; it directly presides over the soul, who is the experiencer of *prakṛti*. The second form of Śiva, called Tatpuruṣa, presides over the object of experience which is [all-pervading] and the support of the *guṇas* (i.e. the *prakṛti* made of *sattva, rajas, tamas*). The third form of Pinākin, called Aghora, stands within the *buddhi* principle with its components *dharma* etc. The fourth form of Śaṃkara, called Vāmadeva, resides always in *ahaṃkāra* and produces many evolutes. [The fifth form, called Sadyojāta, presides over the mind (*manas*)]. The form of Śaṃkara called Īśāna is the lord of the sense of hearing, speech and the all-pervading space. Intelligent sages who know intellectual inquiry say that the form of Śiva called Puruṣa is the lord of skin, hand, touch and wind. Sages say that the form called Aghora presides over the eye, feet, colour and fire. The form of Śaṃkara called Vāmadeva is known [by sages] as the lord of the tongue, the organ of excretion, taste and water. [Sages] know that the form of Śaṃkara called Sadyojāta is the lord of the nose, the organ of generation, smell and earth.

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These forms of Śaṃbhu must be worshipped always, strenuously by those who desire the highest good; they are the unique source of the highest rewards.

mūrti	adhiṣṭhāna	karmendriya	jñānendriya	tanmātra	bhūta
Iśāna	puruṣa	speech	ear	sound	space
Tatpuruṣa	prakṛti	hand	skin	touch	wind
Aghora	buddhi	feet	eye	colour	fire
Vāmadeva	ahaṃkāra	o. excretion	tongue	taste	water
Sadyojāta	manas	o. generation	nose	smell	earth

(See also VDhPur 58.2–3ab)

The **Śiva Purāṇa** establishes another correspondence between the five elements and the five actions of Sadāśiva:

सृष्टिः स्थितिश्च संहारस्तिरोभावोऽप्यनुग्रहः ।
पञ्चैव मे जगत्कृत्यं नित्यसिद्धमजाच्युतौ ॥
* * *
सर्गादि यच्चतुःकृत्यं संसारपरिजृम्भणम् ।
पञ्चमं मुक्तिहेतुर्वै नित्यं मयि च सुस्थिरम् ॥
तदिदं पञ्चभूतेषु दृश्यते मामकैर्जनैः ।
सृष्टिर्भूमौ स्थितिस्तोये संहारः पावके तथा ॥
तिरोभावोऽनिले तद्वदनुग्रह इहाम्बरे ।
सृज्यते धरया सर्वमद्भिः सर्वं प्रवर्धते ॥
अर्द्यते तेजसा सर्वं वायुना चापनीयते ।
व्योम्नाऽनुगृह्यते सर्वं ज्ञेयमेवं हि सूरिभिः ॥

ŚPur I.10.2, 5–8

Śiva said: Creation, maintenance, resorption, concealment and grace are my five actions with regard to the world; they are eternally accomplished, O Brahman and Viṣṇu... The first four actions, creation etc. manifest the world. The fifth one is the cause of liberation. They are always well-established in me. They are seen by my devotees in this world in the five elements: creation in earth, maintenance in water, resorption in fire, concealment in wind, and grace in space. Everything is created by earth, everything grows with water, everything is destroyed by fire, everything is pushed away by wind, everything is graced by space. The sages know thus.

Vaiṣṇava mythology conceives also its supreme godhead as pervading the elements and in particular establishes relations between them and the weapons or emblems of Viṣṇu.

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नैतान्यायुधजातानि परमार्थेन यादव ।
महाभूतान्यथैतानि हरिर्धारयते प्रभुः ॥
खं विजानीहि देवस्य करे शङ्खो महाभुजः ।
चक्रं जानीहि पवनं गदां तेजस्तथा विभोः ॥
आपः पद्मं विजानीहि पादमध्ये व्यवस्थितम् ।
महभूतान्यथैतानि त्यक्तानि हरिणा नृप ॥

VDhPur III.85.16–18

O Yādava, in reality these are not weapons; they are the great elements borne by the Lord Hari. The conch-shell in the hand of the Lord should be known as being space, the disk as wind, the club as fire, the lotus as water [and earth?] as placed between his feet. Thus these great elements are [manifested] by Hari.

A scheme of creation of the elements (*bhūtasṛṣṭi*) is implied by such correspondences established with forms, parts, emblems of a God. It had its roots in the Vedas. The scheme of evolution of →*prakṛti*, as defined in Sāṃkhya or Tantras is also integrated in myths of creation in different ways. For instance, the **Śiva Purāṇa** considers on one side Sadāśiva in his five forms, Iśāna etc. and on the other side the material cause which is Śakti, also called *bindu* and which has several aspects, the five *kalās* Śāntyatītā etc., the phonemes, the parts of *praṇava* etc. The duality of the God and the Śakti is shown as the relation of the word and its meaning (*vācaka* and *vācya*) and as a union (*mithuna*) in this form. The five couples made of a *mūrti* of Sadāśiva and an aspect of the *śakti, kalā* or phoneme, generate the elements:

अनुग्रहादिकृत्यानां हेतुः पञ्चकमिष्यते ।
तद्विद्भिर्मुनिभिः प्रज्ञैर्वरतत्त्वप्रदर्शिभिः ॥
वाच्यवाचकसंबंधान्मिथुनत्वमुपेयुषि ।
कलावर्णस्वरूपेऽस्मिन्पञ्चके भूतपञ्चकम् ॥
वियदादि क्रमादासीदुत्पन्नं मुनिपुङ्गव ।
आद्यं मिथुनमारभ्य पञ्चमं यन्मयं विदुः ॥
शब्दैकगुण आकाशः शब्दस्पर्शगुणो मरुत् ।
शब्दस्पर्शरूपगुणप्रधानो वह्निरुच्यते ॥
शब्दस्पर्शरूपरसगुणकं सलिलं स्मृतम् ।
शब्दस्पर्शरूपरसगन्धाढ्या पृथिवी स्मृता ॥
व्यापकत्वं च भूतानामिदमेव प्रकीर्तितम् ।
व्याप्यत्वं वैपरीत्येन गन्धादिक्रमतो भवेत् ॥
भूतपञ्चकरूपोऽयं प्रपञ्चः परिकीर्त्यते ।
विराट् सर्वसमष्ट्यात्मा ब्रह्माण्डमिति च स्फुटम् ॥

ŚPur VI.16.61–67

This set of five [couples] is accepted as the cause of the actions

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of grace etc., by the intelligent sages, hermits who know this and who see the supreme essence. When this set of five whose nature is the *kalās* and phonemes enjoyed the state of couple [with the five *mūrtis*] with the form of a relation of word and meaning, the five elements space etc. were born in succession, O best of sages, starting from the first couple of which sages know that the fifth is made (i.e. the first pervades the successive ones, so that the properties engendered for the first element is recurrent in the following ones). Space has the only property of sound; wind has sound and touch; fire has sound, touch and colour; water has sound, touch, colour and taste; earth has sound, touch, colour, taste and smell. This is the order in which the elements pervade [the subsequent ones]. In the reverse order, i.e. beginning with smell, they are pervaded [by the subsequent ones]. This phenomenal universe is well-known as made of this set of five elements. It is Virāj made of the composition of all; it is the *brahmāṇḍa.*

Virāj and *brahmāṇḍa* are well-known entities in the myths of creation. They represent the first stage, what is produced by the supreme God and from which the phenomenal world emerges. They are defined here by their constitution, i.e. the five elements. It is interesting to see that at the top level five generating entities have been postulated. And these entities are ordered in the same way as the resultive elements. The first couple is told to contain the four following ones, the second, the three subsequent ones, and so on. We have seen that the first element has a property which pervades the subsequent elements; the second has two properties pervading the following elements, and so on. The generating couples of Sadāśivas's *mūrtis* and *śakti's kalās* are: Iśāna and Śāntyatītā, Tatpuruṣa and Śānti, Aghora and Vidyā, Vāmadeva and Pratiṣṭhā, Sadyojāta and Nivṛtti, engendering respectively space, wind, fire, water, earth.

The word *bhūtasarga*, like *bhūtasṛṣṭi*, refers to such processes of creation of the elements. However it has also other meanings in conformity with the polysemy of the word *bhūta*. First, because of the association of elements with the *tanmātras, bhūtasarga* may refer to the process of creation of both entities. For instance, the **Bhāgavata Purāṇa** in an account of nine creations covering all the components of the cosmos according to the Sāṃkhya view says:

भूतसर्गस्तृतीयस्तु तन्मात्रो द्रव्यशक्तिमान् ।

BhāgPur III.10.15ab

The third is the creation of *bhūtas*, in its mere principle; it has the power [to produce] the substances. (See also AgPur XX.1)

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The word *tanmātra* qualifies *sarga*: the creation which is only that, i.e. viewed at the level of the generic properties; and the commentator Śrīdhara explains *bhūtasarga* as signifying 'creation of subtle elements'. He explains *dravyaśaktimān* by simply saying "producer of the *mahābhūtas*".

Bhūtasarga is also the 'creation of beings' including living beings. The **Viṣṇu Purāṇa**, may be, refers to living beings in the following:

बीजाद्वृक्षप्ररोहणे यथा नापचयस्तरोः ।
भूतानां भूतसर्गेण नैवास्त्यपचयस्तथा ॥

ViPur II.7.35

In the growth of a tree from the seed, no detriment occurs to the parent plant, neither is there any waste of beings by the generation of others.

The **Mahābhārata** narrates a *bhūtasarga* as the creation of animate and inanimate beings, taking place in a sacrifice celebrated by Brahman. The God pours his own semen (*śukra*) as an oblation in fire:

ततः स जनयामास भूतग्रामं स वीर्यवान् ।
ततस्तु तेजसस्तस्माज्जज्ञे लोकेषु तैजसम् ॥
तमसस्तामसा भावा व्यापि सत्त्वं तथोभयम् ।
सगुणस्तेजसो नित्यं तमस्याकाशमेव च॥
सर्वभूतेष्वथ तथा सत्त्वं तेजस्तथा तमः ।
शुक्रे हुतेऽग्नौ तस्मिंस्तु प्रादुरासंस्त्रयः प्रभो ॥

MBh XIII.85.12–14

From that [semen] He begot the class of beings, He who is endowed with vigour. From the *tejas* part of that [semen] were born the beings endowed with *tejas* in the worlds, from the *tamas* part those endowed with *tamas*, the *sattva* pervading both classes of beings. Always this [*sattva*] substance is [the source] of light, space, is in *tamas*. And in all beings there is *sattva*, *tejas* and *tamas*. When this semen was offered in fire, the three came into being.

Manifestation in the Arts

Indian iconography has retained the supernatural beings which form the retinue of the God Śiva. Śaiva Tāntric literature and Śilpa-Śāstra occasionally mention Bhūtas or Gaṇas or Bhūtagaṇas as a subject to be represented in

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sculpture or painting in a temple. Images of Bhūtas occur in representations of several *mūrtis* of Śiva. According to the **Ajitāgama**, Bhikṣāṭana is followed by "an excellent Gaṇa, singing, carrying a begging-bowl and running to his left" (AjitĀ XXXVI.222–23), Kaṅkāladhara is "followed by many Gaṇas of great shining, one carrying on his head a begging-bowl, another singing, one carrying an umbrella, one leading the bull, and many female Gaṇas (*strīgaṇas*) intoxicated with love" (*ibid.* 226–28). The same Āgama in the chapter on images (Pratimālakṣaṇavidhi) deals also very shortly with Gaṇas as a separate item. It prescribes the making of one set of eighteen Gaṇas and a second set of an unlimited number of Gaṇeśvaras:

अष्टादशगणांश्चैव द्विभुजांश्च द्विनेत्रकान् ॥
सर्वेषां मकुटं कुर्याद्द्वादशाङ्गुलमायतम् ।
* * *
अन्यान्गणेश्वरांश्चापि वामनाञ्जटिलान्बहून् ॥
भीषणान्सुप्रसन्नांश्च ह्रस्वग्रीवान्महोदरान् ।
महाकायान्महानासान्महाकर्णांस्तथापरान् ॥
सिंहास्यान्द्विपवक्त्रांश्च नानावर्णाकृतींस्तथा ।
कारयेत्प्रतिमारूपं सर्वं स्यादुपवीतधृत् ॥

AjitĀ XXXVI.355cd–356ab,357cd–59

One should make images of eighteen Gaṇas with two arms and two eyes, a tiara of twelve *aṅgulas* for all. – One should order the making of other Gaṇeśvaras also, dwarfish, with matted hair, numerous, of terrifying or serene look, with a short neck and a big belly, having a large trunk, a big nose, large ears, then others with lion or elephant head, of different shapes and colours. Every image should bear the sacred thread....

We remark that in such a description there is no emphasis on the terrifying or disquieting nature often ascribed to the Bhūtas. Those which are attendants of Śiva are mostly of pleasant look. Grotesque features are freely ascribed to them, but the global image coming out of this text is more that of a benevolent being. This corresponds very well to South Indian sculpture. Images of Bhūtagaṇas occur sometimes in representations of Śiva's *mūrtis*, often shown in friezes, as dwarfs playing, singing, smiling. They are a subject in which an artist can display his sense of humour. A frieze of Gaṇas is often an architectural motive and prescribed in architectural texts. It is often seen on a slanting moulding below the cornice or *kapota* at the top of a wall. The frieze in this location is such a regular motive that the word *bhūtamālā* is used as the technical designation of the moulding itself. For instance, in a list of the mouldings of the *prastara* which is the topmost part of a wall, the **Ajitāgama** says:

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तदूर्ध्वे दण्डमानेन भूतमालां प्रकल्पयेत् ॥

AjitĀ XIV.50cd

Above the [*vājana*, square fillet at the top of the architrave] one should make the frieze of Bhūtas with a measurement of one *daṇḍa*.

Bhūtas of terrifying aspect are also present in the mythology of Śiva. In sculpture they are not represented as often as the good-looking Gaṇas, are not mixed with them and not seen in the same locations in the temples. A striking example and, may be, the most awe-inspiring images in South India is that of two man-size images of standing Bhūtas as guardians of the entrance to a sanctum of Kālī in the temple of Doḍḍagaḍḍavalli (Karṇāṭaka, Hoysāḷa 12th Cent. A.D.). Another example is the representation of the Tamil Saint Kāraikkāḷ Ammaiyar who, out of devotion, had a vision of Śiva's dance in cremation grounds and became a Bhūta. In several temples of Tamilnadu and Cambodia she is shown, skeleton-like, playing *tāla* for Naṭarāja's dance.

Alaṃkāra-Śāstra considers the different languages fit for literature and reserves a place for the language of Bhūtas (*bhūtavacana*), otherwise called *paiśācī*. This is one of the literary Prakrits described by grammarians, and supposed to be the language in which the original **Bṛhatkathā** was composed by Guṇāḍhya. Bhoja is very appreciative of this language:

गिरः श्रव्या दिव्याः प्रकृतिमधुराः प्राकृतधुराः ।
सुभव्योऽपभ्रंशः सरसरचनं भूतवचनम् ॥
विदग्धानामिष्टे मगधमथुरावासिभणिती ।
निबद्धा यस्तेषां स इह कविराजो विजयते ॥

SarK II.16

Divine words (i.e. Sanskrit) are worth listening, speech replete with Prakrit is sweet by nature, Apabhraṃśa is very beautiful, the language of Bhūtas provides charming compositions. The speech of the residents of Magadha and Mathurā is used for the pleasure of the learned. He who composes in all these languages is a king of poets, surpassing all.

The concept of *bhūta* 'element' of gross matter is not taken into consideration directly by the theoricians of art, because of its abstract and general character. The artists and poets mostly express their sensibility with reference to individual substances, and their imagination works more on concrete objects. However, we remark that a few artists and theoricians were so conscious of the existence of a deep structure of the phenomenal world that they have integrated it in the scope of their inquiries about the hidden, subjacent, subtle layers of

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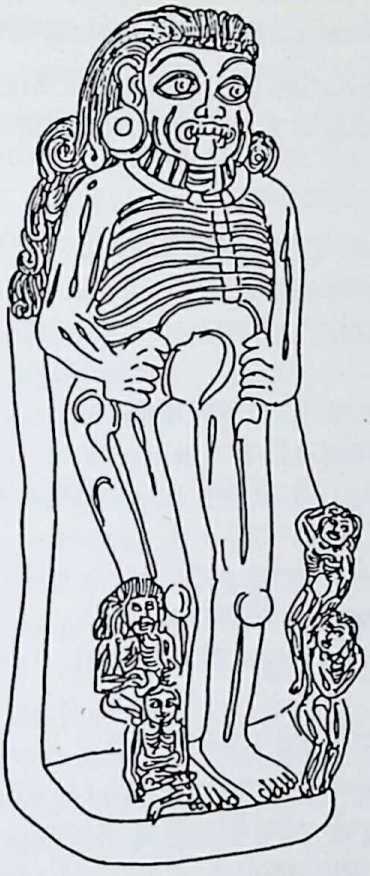

Figure 9: *Bhūta*: Doḍḍagaḍḍavalli, Karnataka, Hoysāḷa 12th Cent. A.D.

the world. Though it seems to be a unique case, it is remarkable that the **Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad** imagines the activity of the architect as a religious function imitating the creation of the elements:

> यथा विश्वसृष्टौ पञ्चमहाभूतानि प्रजायन्ते, तथा वृत्ताधारे शिल्प-काश्यपादयो वास्तुहोतारो भूतमहाभूतलक्षणानि कल्पयन्ति प्रपातनेनेति ।
>
> VSUp II.10
>
> As in the creation of the world arise the five great elements, similarly with the circle as support Śilpakāśyapa and other priests of art conceive and dispose the features of beings and elements. (Tr. A. Boner – B. Bäumer)

Not only is the creation of art likened to the creation of the world, but the basic forms are also described as symbolizing the five elements, e.g. the horizontal line is water, the vertical is fire, the diagonal is wind, etc. The conception

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of this text is consistent, for as the cosmic elements are the constituents of the universe, the basic geometrical forms are the constitutents of art.

Śārṅgadeva begins his treatise on music and his chapter on the nature and origin of musical sound, with a vast picture of the creation of the elements, bodies and types of beings:

आत्मनः पूर्वमाकाशस्ततो वायुस्ततोऽनलः ॥
अनलाज्जलमेतस्मात्पृथिवी समजायत ।
महाभूतान्यमून्येषा विराजो ब्रह्मणस्तनुः ॥
* * *
क्षेत्रज्ञःस्थित आकाश आकाशाद्वायुमागतः ।
वायोर्धूमं ततश्चाभ्रमभ्रान्मेघेऽवतिष्ठते ॥
आहुत्याऽऽप्यायितो ग्रस्तरसो ग्रीष्मे च भानुभिः ।
भानुर्मेघे घनरसं निधत्ते तं बलाहकः ॥
यदा वर्षति वर्षेण सह जीवस्तदा भुवः ।
वनस्पत्योषधीर्जाताः संक्रामत्यविलक्षितः ॥
ताभ्योऽन्नं जातमन्नं तत्पुरुषैः शुक्रतां गतम् ।
* * *
देहो भूतात्मकस्तस्मादादत्ते तद्गुणानिमान् ॥
शब्दं श्रोत्रं सुषिरतां वैविक्त्यं सूक्ष्मबोद्धृताम् ।
बिलं च गगनाद्वायोः स्पर्शं स्पर्शनेन्द्रियम् ॥
उत्क्षेपणमवक्षेपाकुञ्चने गमनं तथा ।
प्रसारणमितीमानि पञ्च कर्माणि रूक्षताम् ॥
प्राणापानौ तथा व्यानसमानोदानसंज्ञकान् ।
नागं कूर्मं च कृकरं देवदत्तं धनञ्जयम् ॥
दशेति वायुविकृतीस्तथा गृह्णाति लाघवम् ।
तेषां मुख्यतमः प्राणो नाभिकन्दादधःस्थितः ॥
* * *
वातादिधातुप्रकृतिर्व्योमादिप्रकृतिस्तथा ॥
सप्तधा सात्त्विको यश्च ब्रह्मेन्द्रयमविग्रहः ।
वारुणश्चाथ कौबेर आर्षो गान्धर्वविग्रहः ॥
राजसः षड्विधो यश्च पैशाचो राक्षसस्तथा ।
आसुरः शाकुनः सार्पः प्रेतदेहस्तथापरः ॥
तामसस्त्रिविधो यश्च पशुमत्स्याङ्गिपाकृतिः ।

SR I.2.12cd–13, 18–21ab, 56cd–60, 71cd–74ab

From *ātman* emanated space, first of all, followed by wind, fire, water and earth in their respective order. These are the great elements and they constitute the body of Brahman, then called Virāj...

The self-aware intelligence, the resident of space, descends into wind and from wind into smoke, from smoke into cloud-formation and

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from the cloud-formation into the cloud. The sun, being satiated by the oblations and surrounded by vapours drawn by its rays in the summer. confines the waters in the clouds. When the clouds release the waters, the self-conscious intelligent being, descending with the showers, transfers itself imperceptibly to the terrestrial growth of trees and herbs. This (vegetation) becomes food; and when eaten by men, is transformed into semen...

The body is a composite of the [five] great elements and has therefore acquired their qualities (as herein described): sound, the faculty of hearing, porosity, individuation, intelligence and hollowness from space; and touch, the sense organ for touch, five types of motion, viz. upwards, downwards, contraction, linear movement and expansion from wind. The ten modifications of wind (breath in the body) viz. *prāṇa, apāna, vyāna, samāna, udāna, nāga, kūrma, kṛkara, devadatta, dhanañjaya* and roughness as well as lightness are also derived from the wind. Of these *prāṇa* which is the most important one, is stationed below the root of the navel...

The constitution [of bodies] is according to *dhātus* such as *vāta* (wind) etc., and elements such as space etc. The *sāttvika* [constitution] is of seven types such as the bodies of Brahman, Indra, Yama, Varuṇa, Kubera, *ṛṣis* and *gandharvas*. The *rājasa* [constitution] is of seven types, such as the bodies of *piśācas, rākṣasas, asuras*, birds, snakes and *pretas*. The *tāmasa* [constitution] is of three types such as the bodies of animals, fishes and trees. (Based on the tr. by P.L. Sharma)

In actual practice, we see that the concept of five elements has been integrated in Śaiva iconography, in connection with the concept of *liṅga*. The concept of the eight bodies (*aṣṭamūrti*) of Śiva is a theme common to all schools of Śaivism and Purāṇas; it includes the five elements. That has been represented in the form of five *liṅgas* worshipped in five temples of South India: a *liṅga* of space in Chidambaram (Tamilnadu), of wind in Kalahasti (Andhra), of fire in Tiruvannamalai (Tamilnadu) of water in Tiruvanaikka (near Tiruchirapalli, Tamilnadu), of earth in Kanchipuram (Tamilnadu).

Kālidāsa who has brought poetry to the deepest levels of thought, invokes Śiva in the same eight forms and thus gives a striking description of the five elements grouped all together:

या सृष्टिः स्रष्टुराद्या वहति विधिहुतं या हविर्या च होत्री
ये द्वे कालं विधत्तः श्रुतिविषयगुणा या स्थिता व्याप्य विश्वम् ।

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यामाहुः सर्वबीजप्रकृतिरिति यया प्राणिनः प्राणवन्तः
प्रत्यक्षाभिः प्रपन्नस्तनुभिरवतु वस्ताभिरष्टाभिरीशः ॥

AbhŚāk I.1

May the Lord protect you, He who is endowed with eight visible bodies: Brahman's first creation, the carrier of oblations offered according to the Rule, the Sacrificer, the creators of time, the world-pervader whose quality the ear grasps, the celebrated source of all seeds, that which gives the breath of life to living beings.

They are respectively water, fire, soul (agent of sacrifice), sun and moon (base of the calendar), space, earth, wind.

When Kālidāsa intends to praise the advent of the universal king, Raghu, he goes to the extent of considering the effect of the new king's rule on the very principles of matter, i.e. the elements, implying *a fortiori* the new prosperity brought to the earth. Speaking about the principles, he suggests that the new king's rule brings not a surface prosperity but a deep and durable one.

पञ्चानामपि भूतानामुत्कर्षं पुपुषुर्गुणाः ।
नवे तस्मिन्महीपाले सर्वं नवमिवाभवत् ॥

Ragh IV.11

The qualities of all the five elements thrived to the farthest point. On the advent of this new king, everything seemed to have become new.

Thus Kālidāsa contemplated the highest degree of a king's power of protection in the elements. Similarly Bhartṛhari pursued the extreme of detachment (*vairāgya*) in the same principles:

मातर्मेदिनि तात मारुत सखे तेजः सुबन्धो जल
भ्रातर्व्योम निबद्ध एष भवतामन्त्यः प्रणामाञ्जलिः ।
युष्मत्संगवशोपजातसुकृतस्फारस्फुरन्निर्मल-
ज्ञानापास्तसमस्तमोहमहिमा लीये परे ब्रह्मणि ॥

VairŚat 100

O earth, my mother, O wind, my father, O fire, my friend, O water, my good relative, O space, my brother, for the last time I salute you and I fold my palms to you. By virtue of my association with you I accumulated merits from the abundance of which arose in me the pure knowledge, dispeller of all delusions. Now I merge in the Supreme Brahman.

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Process

The concept of five elements is the starting point of an elaborate Tāntric rite of self-purification. For instance, the Śaiva Siddhānta school of Tantra considers that the prerequisite of *Śivapūjā* is a purification of the elements of the body related to the five *kalās* or parts of the Śakti. This purification is considered as transforming the body of the worshipper into Śiva himself. And it can be compared to the rite of liberation called *nirvāṇadīkṣā*. The soul (*jīva*) is placed in the *dvādaśānta* point above the head, where it is united to Śiva. Then the purification of elements in the body is done by merging each element in another one in a definite order, purifying it through the enunciation of a *bīja* with a *prāṇāyāma*, two operations called *dahana* 'burning' and *āplāvana* 'immersion' with the nectar of the main *Śivamantra*. Then the worshipper replaces his soul in the new pure body. This is described with details in the **Somaśambhu Paddhati** III.8–30. Other processes of *bhūtaśuddhi* are described in many Tantras (see Kṛṣṇānanda's TSā II).

In Yoga the peculiar concept of subtle and subtler forms of the *bhūtas* is the starting point of an exercise of meditation resulting in the acquisition of supernatural powers. The standard yogic exercise aiming at such powers consists in the fixation of the psychism on one location (*dhāraṇā*), the continuous meditation on an object (*dhyāna*) upto the point where the Yogin feels that he has merged with the object (*samādhi*). The three stages are called by a technical name, *saṃyama*. Through *saṃyama* practiced on the five elements in their five forms the Yogin gets a direct experience of the proper form of each aspect and mastery over the elements (*bhūtajaya*). Vyāsa describes *bhūtajaya* thus:

> तत्र पञ्चभूतस्य रूपाणि जित्वा भूतजयी भवति । तज्जयाद्वत्सानुसारिण्य इव गावोऽस्य संकल्पानुविधायिन्यो भूतप्रकृतयो भवन्ति ॥
>
> YSūBh III.43
>
> When [the Yogin] has conquered the essence of the five elements, he is a 'conqueror of elements'. By virtue of his victory, the root causes of the elements become subservient to his will, as the cows comply with the desires of their calf.

Then Patañjali shows the powers acquired by this victorious Yogin:

> ततोऽणिमादिप्रादुर्भावः कायसंपत्तद्धर्मानभिघातश्च ॥
>
> ... तद्धर्मानभिघातश्च – पृथ्वी मूर्त्या न निरुणद्धि योगिनः शरीरादिक्रियां शिलामप्यनुविशतीति । नापः स्निग्धाः क्लेदयन्ति । नाग्निरुष्णो दहति । न वायुः

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प्रणामी वहति । अनावरणात्मकेऽप्याकाशे भवत्यावृतकायः सिद्धानामप्यदृश्यो भवति ।

YSūBh III.44

From that [victory] arise the power of taking atom-size etc., the body-perfection and the power not to be stopped by the properties of the [elements].

There is the power not to be stopped by the properties of the [elements]. When the earth in spite of its hardness does not stop the actions of the Yogin's body etc., when it complies with his activity, when fluid waters do not damp him, hot fire does not burn him, strong wind does not carry him away, when he hides his body in space which does not hide anything, and when he becomes invisible even to Siddhas.

Patañjali enunciates only the structure of the exercise. His *sūtra* is a general rule which can have many applications to particular cases. Other texts of Yoga show possible applications, giving practical instructions and stating details about the objects of meditation. Thus, the **Yogayājñavalkya** presents an exercise of *dhāraṇā* of five deities in the five elements which are themselves in five regions of the body: Brahman parameṣṭhin in earth, Viṣṇu in water, Rudra in fire, Īśvara in wind, Sadāśiva in space (see YYāj VIII.5–15). Tantras also contain many Yogic procedures. For instance, the **Mṛgendra Āgama** gives one particular version of control over the elements or *bhūtajaya* through a *dhāraṇā*:

हृदि चेतसि विक्षिप्ते धारयेत्क्षितिमर्थवित् ॥
जलं पिपासितः कण्ठे मन्देऽग्नौ जठरेऽनलम् ।
प्राणादिवृत्तिसिद्ध्यर्थं हृत्कण्ठादिषु मारुतम् ॥
विषाद्यभिभवे व्योम तेषु यत्रोपयोगवत् ।

MṛgĀ yp I.40cd–42ab

If the mind is distracted the knower of the truth should make concentration on the earth in the heart. If one is thirsty one should concentrate on the water in the throat, if appetite is feeble one should concentrate on fire in the stomach, for the control of vital airs and their movement one should concentrate on the wind in the heart, the throat and other locations. When one is overpowered by poison and other troubles one should concentrate on the space in the limb where it is needed. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)
(See also ŚSū III.5 and Kṣemarāja's Vimarśinī, SvT VII.294ff.)

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The **Laghu Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha** describes an exercise of *bhāvanā* on the elements and their *tanmātras*; it corresponds to the *dhyāna* stage of Patañjali:

कलयन्ती मनःशक्तिरादौ भावयति क्षणात् ।
आकाशभावनामच्छां शब्दबीजरसोन्मुखीम् ॥
ततस्तद्घनतां यातं घनस्पन्दक्रमान्मनः ।
भावयत्यनिलस्पन्दं स्पर्शबीजरसोन्मुखम् ॥
ताभ्यामाकाशवाताभ्यां दृढाभ्यासवशाद्यतः ।
शब्दस्पर्शस्वरूपाभ्यां संघर्षाज्जायतेऽनलः ॥
मनस्तादृग्गुणगतं रसतन्मात्रवेदनम् ।
क्षणाच्चेतत्यपां शैत्यं जलसंवित्ततो भवेत् ॥
ततस्तादृग्गुणगतं मनो भावयति क्षणात् ।
गन्धतन्मात्रमेतस्माद्भूमिसंवित्ततो भवेत् ॥

LYVās Sthiti Prakaraṇa IV.77–81

In the beginning the power of mind should perform instantly a pure meditation of space inclined towards the experience of its seed which is the *tanmātra* of sound. Then the mind becomes solidified on account of excessive vibration; it meditates on the vibration of wind, inclined towards the experience of its seed which is the *tanmātra* of touch. Then by steady practice with space and wind whose properties are sound and touch, the fire is born out of friction of both. When the mind associated with the above qualities meditates on the *tanmātra* of taste, it immediately becomes aware of the coolness of water; then from it the consciousness of water comes about. Then being associated with the above qualities the mind immediately meditates on the *tanmātra* of smell from which earth consciousness comes about.

Conclusion

The word *bhūta* is characterised by a remarkable polysemy. Two meanings, namely 'living being' and 'elements' have emerged as prominent in usage, because they were inspiring concepts and important components of general Indian culture. There is a rich history of the transformations and new applications of these concepts. However, the trace of the prehistory of the word never disappears. The Indo-European root contained the idea of creation and growth. The conscious etymologies, the historical developments of the usage and the applications of the word to new meanings and concepts, have never touched the idea of absolute Being, but were rather concentrated on the notion of being as a

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process of creation and evolution. *Bhūta* remains the living creature, the always changing matter. The striking historical developments of the references of the word are on one side the restrictive applications to supernatural beings, namely the disquieting, invisible spirits or the more serene dwarfs of Śaiva mythology, on the other hand the concept of five elements of gross matter which are the result of the transformation of a more subtle matter.

In Indian culture there is no opposition between the concept of living being and gross matter. On the contrary, there is the remarkable idea of a continuity between the two. The living sentient being is not only the possessor of a material body; it is also the lord of a subtle body comprising all the faculties which make it sentient and animate; and the gross body is conceived as a transformation of the matter of the same subtle body. The gross element has a subtler material cause which is its general property having itself a still more subtle material cause, the principle of individuation at a deeper level of the psychism. It is natural that the same word *bhūta* refers to the whole process of evolution and to particular stages at the same time.

Abundance and richness are also notions contained in the original Indo-European root. They always remained in underlying form in the history of the word *bhūta*. The immanence of God in the world is a poetical and religious theme which the **Viṣṇu Purāṇa** has treated with the help of this word, playing with its polysemy and relying on its connotation of evergrowing plenteousness:

पृथग्भूतैकभूताय भूतभूताय ते नमः ।
प्रभूतभूतभूताय तुभ्यं भूतात्मने नमः ॥

ViPur 1.12.69

Salutation to thee, the subtile rudiment, which, being single, becomes manifold. Salutation to thee, soul of existent things, identical with the great elements. (Tr. H.H. Wilson)

Viṣṇu is single as the cause, manyfold as the effect of the process of evolution. He is the subtle cause of matter (*bhūta* in its *sūkṣma* form of *tanmātra*). He is made of the elements which are *prabhūta*, abundant and gross. He is the *bhūtas* or creatures mobile and immobile.

Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat

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ĀKĀŚA

Overview

Ākāśa (mn.) (derived from *ā-kāś-* 'to shine', 'to be visible'), *kha* (derived from *khan-* 'to dig') and *vyoman* (derived from *vi-ava-* 'to protect') form a group of words that bear several layers of meaning relating to various levels, physical and metaphysical, elemental and transcendental, macrocosmic and microcosmic, mathematical and astrological. In Vedic literature, their original meanings can be distinguished; but after several semantic changes, they converge to mean 'space'. Thus these three words (along with *ambara*, *nabhas*, *viyat*, *gagana*, etc.) are often used as synonyms in the later literature, although their original shades of meaning are not entirely obliterated.

Space is the first element to emanate from the Supreme Self, initially as a subtle principle and thereafter as gross matter. Space, abounding in the attributes of *sattva*, is the subtlest of all the five elements. Space provides room for all further creation, and its specific quality is sound. Moreover, it is a symbol of the Supreme Self. When used as a metaphor, it indicates the Supreme Self. Space is sometimes conceived as fullness, filling everything, and sometimes as vacuum.

Space has served as an instrument for transcending matter, for entering into the space of consciousness as a spiritual state. Hence meditation on space is an important part of the spiritual practices (*sādhanā*) in many systems of spiritual quest.

In mystic experience one may, in the inmost recess of the heart, realize the Supreme Self, which is microcosmic, macrocosmic and transcendental, and, as such, is the highest principle of unity underlying all apparent plurality. Space appears to differ owing to the difference of the limiting adjuncts, imposed upon it, though it is one in reality. The analogy of space is a way of explaining nonduality as the highest truth. However, the various philosophical schools may differ in their concept of space.

Since creative activity and all the art forms imitate the process of creation, the concept of space, the first created principle, is the very basis on which artistic creation proceeds. Emptiness is the prerequisite for the manifestation of name and form. The geometric form that represents *ākāśa* in the Tantras is the circle that symbolizes the totality of creation. Fullness and expansion, along

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with the connotations of space, permeate the arts. Art represents on the material level the concept of space as the model of microcosmic and macrocosmic relationships, the unity of inner and outer space.

Etymology and Related Words

Ākāśa is derived from the root *kāś-* 'to shine', 'to be visible' with the prefix *ā*. *Ākāśa* 'space' lets things be visible, it allows them to manifest themselves. Kṣīrasvāmin explains: *ākāśante sūryādayo'trākāśam*, "That in which the sun and other things shine" (on AmKo I.2.2). Devarāja Yajvan says the same in his commentary on **Nighaṇṭu** I.3.7 (*ā samantāt kāśante dīpyante sūryādayo'tra*). *Ākāśa*, the vast expanse of the sky, the space in which the luminaries are seen and move, is connected with light (→*jyotis*, *ākāśaṃ dṛṣṭvā jyotir atreti gamyate, jyotirnimittaṃ hy ākāśam*, Mahābh on Pā IV.1.3). The same word is used to refer to *brahman*, but even then the said etymology holds good, cf. *sambhavati ca parasya brahmaṇaḥ prakāśakatvād ākāśaśabdābhidheyatvam ākāśate ākāśayati ca iti*, "Brahman may suitably be called 'space' (*ākāśa*) because, being of the nature of light, it shines (*ākāśate*) by itself and makes other things shine forth (*ākāśayati*)" (ŚrīBh I.1.23, tr. G. Thibaut). This is because the nature of *brahman* is *prakāśa* 'effulgence' and there is an invariable relationship between light and space (cf. *prakāśākāśayor nityasambandhāt* – ŚBh on ChUp VII.12.2).

Both Kṣīrasvāmin and Devarāja say that the word *ākāśa* may be derived from *na- kāś-* 'that which is not visible' (*na kāśate pṛthivyādivad apratyakṣatvāt*– Devarāja), for *ākāśa*, unlike earth etc., is not visible. In this sense the long initial *ā* is to be explained as a Vedic variation, as Kṣīrasvāmin points out: *chāndaso dīrghaḥ*.

Ākāśya 'being in the air' is derived from *ākāśa* by adding the suffix *yat* (Pā IV.3.54). A fairly large number of compounds are formed with *ākāśa* as a component. A few important words are as follows: *ākāśaga, ākāśacārin* 'moving in the sky', 'a bird', *ākāśagaṅgā* 'the celestial Ganges', *ākāśaja* 'produced from space', *ākāśadīpa* 'a lamp (on a pole etc.) in the air', *ākāśakakṣā* 'the horizon', *ākāśakalpa* 'resembling space', *ākāśamaya* 'consisting of space', *ākāśavat* 'spacious' *ākāśavāṇī* 'a voice from heaven', *ākāśātman* 'having the nature of space', and *ākāśaśarīra* 'having a spatial body'. In some compounds with *ākāśa* as the last member, the word *ākāśa* is used in a metaphorical sense, for example *brahmākāśa* 'brahman as space', *cittākāśa* 'mental space', *cidākāśa* 'consciousness space'. *Mahākāśa* is unlimited space, while *ghaṭākāśa, jalākāśa, meghākāśa*, etc. mean space conditioned by adjuncts like jar, water or clouds etc. Closely related are the words *prakāśa* 'light, effulgence', and *avakāśa* 'space, room', which are derived from the same root.

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Kha is derived from the root *khan-* 'to dig' (*khaṃ punaḥ khanateḥ* – Nir III.13), primarily meaning a hole, an opening, void. Well-known compounds formed with *kha* are as follows: *khaga* or *khagama* 'moving in the sky', 'a bird', hence *khagapati* 'lord of the birds', *khacara* or *khecara* 'moving in the sky', e.g., 'a bird', etc., the sun; *khagola(ka)* 'the celestial sphere', *khadyota* 'fire-fly', *khapura* 'a city (built) in the sky', *khapuṣpa* 'sky-flower' (used in a figurative sense of 'an impossibility'), *khamūrtimat* 'having a spatial or celestial body', *khaprakṛti* 'having the characteristic of space', *khecarī*, name of a *mudrā*, and *khātman*, 'having the nature of space'.

Vyoman is derived from the root *av-* 'to protect' with the prefix *vi* (by adding the suffix *manin* (UṇādiSū IV.144), meaning that which protects everything by making room (*viśeṣeṇāvati prāṇino'vakāśapradānena* – Devarāja on Nigh I.3). Yāska favours this etymology when he explains *parame vyoman* as *parame vyavane* (Nir XI.40). Since the word *vyoman* is found to convey the idea of vastness, Devarāja suggests that the root *av-*, with prefix *vi-*, means 'to pervade' (*vyavati vyāpnoti sarvaṃ jagat*, "that which pervades the whole world"). Similarly, it is said in the **Lakṣmī Tantra**: *viśālatvāt smṛtā vyoma*, "owing to my vastness, I am regarded as *vyoman*" (LT IV.49a, tr. Sanjukta Gupta). Also, compare *vyāpakatvād ameyatvād vyoma ity abhidhīyate*, "As it is all-pervading and immeasurable it is called *vyoman*" (RauĀ vp X.10cd, tr. H.N. Chakravarty).

According to the **Uṇādi-Sūtra** (IV.150), the word is derived from the root *vye-* to cover; but this derivation is not supported by the *padapāṭha* (*vi ऽ oman*). A derivation from *vi-yu* 'to separate' has also been suggested (Mayrhofer, *A Concise Etymological Sanskrit Dictionary*). Grassmann suggests a derivation from the root *vyā-* 'to cover': "vielleicht ursprünglich gewebte Decke" (*Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda*).

Some of the important compounds formed with *vyoman* are the following: *vyomakeśa* (lit. sky-haired) a name of Śiva, *vyomagaṅgā* 'the celestial Ganges', *vyomaga* or *vyomacārin* 'moving through the sky', *vyomavartman* 'the path of the sky', and *vyomasad* 'abiding in space'.

There are some other words used as synonyms of *ākāśa*, *vyoman* and *kha*. The important ones are *antarikṣa*, *nabhas*, *viyat*, *ambara* and *viṣṇupada*. *Antarikṣa* from (*antar-)kṣi* 'to dwell' means 'that which dwells between', i.e. the intermediate space between the earth and heaven (*antareme iti vā* – Nir II.10). But Yāska adds that *antarikṣa* may also mean imperishable space in the body (*śarīreṣv antar akṣayam iti vā*, Nir II.10).

Brahman is called *ākāśātman* (ChUp II.14.2 etc.). The word may be analyzed either as (i) *ākāśavat ātmā yasya*, whose self (i.e. nature) is like *ākāśa*

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(space) or as (ii) *ākāśasya ātmā* 'the self of *ākāśa*'. In the first case, *ākāśa* means 'resembling space', because *brahman* has qualities similar to those of space such as omnipresence. The second is also congruous, because *brahman*, the cause of the whole world, is indeed the self of everything, including space (BrSūBh on I.2.2, ŚrīBh on I.2.2).

Layers of Meaning

I. Kha

The word *kha* means:

(a) the axle-hole, i.e. the round, free space in the centre of a wheel through which the axis runs (ṚV etc.).

(b) Any hole, a cavity, an opening through which something may pass and, by extension, a fountain-head, canal or river-bed (ṚV etc.; cf. different objects compared to various holes in BṛUp V.10.1).

(c) The apertures of the body, seven upper (the ears, the nostrils, the eyes and the mouth, AV) and two lower (hence, the body is called *navakhaṃ puram* in BhāgPur IV.29.7, cf. *navadvāra pura* in ŚvUp III.18), which are the outer openings pierced by the Self-born (KaṭhUp II.1.1). The cavity of the throat is also called *kha* (Prātiśākhya). In Āyurveda the word '*kha*' also denotes all the other pores of the body, inner and outer, through which drops of perspiration or blood may exude, and through which the arteries carry the lymph-chyle throughout the organism. The Dharma-Sūtras and the Smṛti texts often refer to the external apertures of the body with this word (e.g. *adbhiḥ khāni ca saṃspṛśet*, Manu II.53).

(d) The sense organs; since our senses operate through these external bodily apertures.

(e) Space as one of the five elements that compose the world (PraUp VI.4, MuṇḍUp II.1.3, ŚvUp II.12).

(f) A symbol of *brahman* (*khaṃ brahma*, ChUp IV.10.4, BṛUp V.1.1, *khaṃ liṅgam ātmanaḥ*, BhāgPur III.5.32).

(g) The cavity of the heart, the mystic space where one may realize *brahman*, *etad vāva tat svarūpaṃ nabhasaḥ khe'ntarbhūtasya yat paraṃ tejaḥ*, "This is indeed the nature of the space within the cavity (of the heart) that supreme splendour" (MaitUp VII.11).

(h) The atmosphere, the sky, and *antarikṣa*, i.e. the space between heaven and earth, frequently occur in this sense in the Epics, Purāṇas and classical Sanskrit literature. Several well-known compounds are formed with *kha*

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in this meaning. For example, *khecara* which means that which moves in the sky, this can be a bird or a celestial body. Thus the sun is called the best of *khecaras* (*khecarāṇāṃ pravaro yathārkaḥ*, MBh I.83.7d).

(i) Void or vacuum, i.e. devoid of matter, as a spiritual state (spoken of in the Āgamas, YVās, etc.); hence *khecara* in such contexts means one who moves in the space of pure consciousness. Accordingly, *khecarī* is *śivāvasthā*, 'Śiva's state', i.e. the supreme state of consciousness (ŚSū II.5, ŚSūVā 20 etc.).

(j) *Śūnya* (in the sense of vacuity). The number zero (→*śūnya*, Vol. II), thus, for example, in mathematical context, *vedakhāgniśarāḥ* means 5304. The number zero is represented by the figure O, which is written like a small hole, reminiscent of one of the original meanings of *kha*.

(k) *Anusvāra*, represented by a similar, small circle (M. Monier-Williams).

(l) The name of a secondary suffix in Pāṇini's grammar. In the **Jainendra Vyākaraṇa**, *kha* denotes elision (*nāśaḥ khaṃ*, I.1.61).

(m) The sound *h*; the seed-syllable (*bīja*) of the space element in the Tantras is often *haṃ*, hence *kha* is, at times, the code word for the letter *h*.

(n) The tenth house, in astrological texts.

II. Vyoman

(a) *Vyoman* is the space above the earth, the sky, the atmosphere and heaven (ṚV etc.); according to the **Nighaṇṭu**, it is partially synonymous with *div, svar, nāka, antarikṣa* and *diśaḥ*.

(b) *Div*, the celestial region, is said to have three layers. These are *div*, *svar* and *nāka*. *Parama vyoman* corresponds to the uppermost layer, the highest heaven, the seat of gods. It is the highest principle above everything in which abide both the evolved and the unevolved beings (ṚV X.5.7) as well as time (AV XIX.53.3) and the imperishable (*akṣara*, ṚV I.164.39). It is where speech is thousand-syllabled (*sahasrākṣarā*, ṚV I.164.41). The highest heaven (*nāka*) is said to be *parama vyoman* (AV XI.1.30).

(c) The mystic space in the cavity of the heart is equated to *parama vyoman* in the Upaniṣad (TUp II.1, where *guhā* means the cavity of the heart; cf. *vyomny ātmā pratiṣṭhitaḥ*, MuṇḍUp II.2.7d).

(d) Space as one of the five elements (*bhūtāni vyomānilānalajalorvyaḥ*, SuSam ŚāSthā I.4; MṛgĀ vp XII.19, cf. MaitUp VI.34).

(e) A metaphysical metaphor for indicating *brahman (brahmavyoman*, YVās VI (II).60.28).

(f) Void (Āgamas, YVās), hence *cidvyoman* (a metaphor) means the void of consciousness.

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(g) In mathematics, it is *śūnya*, the number zero (*śūnyābhragaganaṃ vyoma*, Gaṇitanāmamālā III.16).

(h) The sign of *anusvāra*, a small circle (JaySam VII.62).

(i) The name of a *sāman* (JaimBr II.88).

(j) The name of an Ekāha sacrifice (ĀpŚrSū XXII.12.13, ŚāṅkhŚrSū XIV.24.1).

(k) The tenth house in astrological texts (Sārāvalī IV.35).

(l) The sound *h* in Tāntric codes.

(m) *Vyoman* in TĀr I.1.3 is explained by Sāyaṇa as a pore (*chidram*), which is doubtful.

III. Ākāśa

(a) A free space, a hole, an opening through which somebody or something may pass (AitBr III.42, ŚBr III.3.2.19).

(b) *Antarikṣa*, the space generated by the separation of heaven and earth, the sky (ŚBr VII.12.2.3, BṛUp IV.3.20).

(c) Space as one of the five elements (ŚāṅkhĀr VII.22,AitĀr II.3.1 etc.). Elemental space is conceived to be twofold – subtle and gross. The former is called *ākāśamātrā* in the **Praśna Upaniṣad** IV.8. Even as a physical element, *ākāśa* pervades the whole creation, both inside and outside the person.

(d) The principal space as continuous, unbounded extension in every direction, as is probably meant in BṛUp III.8.4.

(e) A symbol of *brahman*, hence an object of meditation as such (ChUp III.18.1, VII.12.1–2 etc.).

(f) A metaphysical metaphor indicating *brahman* (ChUp I.9.1 etc.). The **Brahma-Sūtra** says that *brahman* is a well-established meaning of *ākāśa* (BrSū I.3.17), and that *ākāśa*, a symbol of *brahman*, denotes that highest Reality (*ākāśas tallińgāt*, BrSū I.1.22).

(g) The mystic space in the lotus of the heart, where the Supreme Reality is realized within the body. This space is conceived to be either the Supreme Reality or its seat. The cavity of the heart is often called *guhā*, the cave where the supreme Soul and the individual soul lie hidden. In this way the Upaniṣads establish the identity of the micro and the macrocosm (ChUp VIII.1).

(h) *Māyā*, according to Śaṅkara (BrSūBh I.4.3), is the *ākāśa* of **Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad** III.8.11 etc. It is the undifferentiated state (*avyakta, avyākṛta*), for it is actually *māyā* that appears as creation.

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(i) Void, vacuum, *ākāśa* understood as the absence of hindrance, absence of form (Buddhism).

(j) *Ākāśa* also means a void or vacuum understood as the absence of matter (Āgamas, YVās).

(k) As a metaphysical metaphor denoting consciousness it appears in such compounds as *cittākāśa* 'mind as space' (psychic), *cidākāśa* 'consciousness as space' (spiritual) (YVās).

(l) The number zero in mathematics (V.S. Apte).

The words *kha*, *vyoman* and *ākāśa*, used in their primary, symbolic and metaphorical sense, cover a large range of meanings relating to various levels, physical and metaphysical, elemental and transcendental, microcosmic and macrocosmic, mathematical and astrological. In the course of our journey through these layers of meaning, we start from a small hole and reach the Ultimate Reality. The different meanings and shades thereof are often interconnected and merge into one another. Originally, in early Vedic literature, there was an appreciable difference in meaning between these three words. Later on, after several semantic shifts, they virtually became synonyms, though their original meanings were not always forgotten. Not only *kha*, *vyoman* or *ākāśa*, but also other words like *gagana*, *ambara*, *viyat*, *nabhas*, etc. are freely used in later literature as synonyms. For example, in the **Brahma-Sūtra**, the words *ākāśa*, *vyoman*, *ambara*, and *viyat* are used interchangeably, as also in the compounds *cidākāśa*, *cidvyoman*, *cidambara*, and *cidgagana*, etc.

Although these words are translated into English as space, ether, void or vacuity, their common meaning may be conveyed by the word 'space'. In the Indian tradition, space has been viewed from different points of view. At the physical material level, space is one of the five elements. Its property is sound and it provides space to everything. It does not conflict with the other elements, but co-exists with them and pervades them. In the body it appears in the form of the bodily cavities. Even at the physical level, space is both outside and inside a person. Normal (*laukika*) perception takes place in the material space (*bhūtākāśa*). Supernormal (*alaukika*) perception can take place in mind as space (*cittākāśa*) and in consciousness as space (*cidākāśa*).

A *yogin* can perceive things that are not normally perceptible. He perceives them in the space of the mind – *cittākāśa*. Objectless perception can take place only in the space of consciousness – *cidākāśa*. But how to reach *cidākāśa*? Space is a means to that end. It is a symbol, through which one tries to grasp the Supreme Self, who is of the nature of space (*ākāśātman*). Meditation on space as void, that is, devoid of matter, helps one to transcend matter and enter the space of spiritual experience. The unbounded, macrocosmic space abides also in the

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microcosm as transcendental space in the small lotus flower of the heart which is experienced as a mystical-spiritual realization. At this level, physical space merges into the space of consciousness as the distinction between inner and outer space is obliterated, and a complete unity between them is established.

With reference to the sacrifice (*adhiyajña*), the Sadasya priest represents *ākāśa* (ṢaḍviṃśaBr II.5.6).

Diś is directional space, related to movement. In Vedic literature *diśaḥ*, the 'totality of the directions', is conceptually connected with *ākāśa*/*vyoman*. *Diśaḥ* is the *adhidaivata* 'divine' counterpart of physical space (*adhibhūta ākāśa*, BṛUp III.9.13).

There are other words that convey a spatial sense, partly overlapping and partly synonymous. Thus, →*kṣetra* (Vol. II) means mostly geographical space; →*deśa* (Vol. II) is measured, bounded space; →*loka* (Vol. II) means notional, regional space, and *diś*, directional space; whereas *ākāśa* means unbounded space, the totality of space. *Ākāśa* and *kāla*, space and time are viewed as complementary units which together form the substrata of everything with *ākāśa* as the substratum of all limited things and *kāla* as that of all processes (*kālāt kriyā vibhajyante, ākāśāt sarvamūrtayaḥ*, Vāk III.7.153).

The popular and poetic meaning of the words *ākāśa*, *kha*, *vyoman* and the like is 'the sky'. Philosophers reject the idea of ascribing any colour to *ākāśa*: *apratyakṣe'pi hy ākāśe bālās talamalinatādy adhyasyanti*, "Non-discerning men superimpose on the ether, which is not the object of sensuous perception, dark-blue colour" (BrSūBh, introd., tr. G. Thibaut). But this could hardly deter the poets, whose convention it is to portray "the pavilion of Heaven" as blue, though some find the sky to be so unique that it can be compared only to itself (*gaganaṃ gaganākāram*, KāvyālSūVṛ IV.3.14).

Development of the Concept

Dyāvāpṛthivī, an important compound in the Vedas, means heaven and earth, implying the world as a whole. The universe is also thought to consist of the three worlds of earth, atmosphere and heaven (ṚV I.139.11,II.40.4, VII.6.15 etc.) – a tripartite division that often finds favour with the Vedic seers. The sky, the space we look up at from the earth, has two layers, namely, *antarikṣa* 'the middle region', to which belong rain, lightning and wind, and (beyond that) *div* 'the celestial region', to which belong the sun and other heavenly bodies. In the Puruṣa-Sūkta (ṚV X.90.14), heaven, the atmosphere and the earth are said to have come into existence from the head, the navel and the feet of the

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cosmic *Puruṣa*, respectively. Their distribution indicates that these three worlds in the said order were considered to be located one below the other and this idea continues also in later literature (e.g. in ŚBr I.9.3.10).

Div frequently designates the space above the earth in the Vedas. "By far the most frequent use of the word *dyaus* is as a designation of the concrete 'sky', in which sense it occurs at least 500 times in the ṚV" (A.A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, p.21). There are verses in the **Ṛgveda** which indicate that each of the three worlds or regions was again considered to be threefold: highest, middle and lowest.

यदुत्तमे मरुतो मध्यमे वा यद् वावमे सुभगासो दिवि ष्ठ ।

ṚV V.60.6ab

Whether, O blessed Maruts, ye be dwelling in highest, midmost, or in lowest heaven. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

The third step of Viṣṇu (*viṣṇupada* is a synonym of *ākāśa* in AmKo) is said to be beyond the reach of normal people (ṚV I.155.5, VII.99.2), but perceivable to the wise (ṚV I.22.20). His highest step is the spring of honey (ṚV I.154.5). The importance attached to the highest heaven (*parama vyoman*) or the highest step of Viṣṇu indicates that it is more than the observable sky.

Besides the said three regions, we also find *svar* and *nāka*: *divaṃ ca pṛthivīṃ cāntarikṣam atho svaḥ* (ṚV X.190.3cd), *yena dyaur ugrā pṛthivī ca dṛḷhā yena svaḥ stabhitaṃ yena nākaḥ* (ṚV X.121.5ab). These three, *div*, *svar* and *nāka*, may therefore denote three *divs*, luminous spaces. A fourth realm may be implied in the expression 'the fourth abode' *turīyaṃ dhāma* (ṚV IX.96.9).

The word *vyoman* is also used to denote the sky, the space above the earth. It means *antarikṣa* 'the atmosphere' in *jyeṣṭhāso na parvatāso vyomani*, "Most excellent, like mountains in the air's mid-region" (ṚV V.87.9c, tr. R.T.H. Griffith). In the **Ṛgveda**, however, *vyoman* is in most cases qualified by *parama*; *parama vyoman* is translated as highest/loftiest/sublimest sky/heaven/firmament (ṚV I.62.7,143.2,164.34,35,39,41; III.32.10; IV.50.4; V.15.2,63.1; VI.8.2; VII.5.7; X.5.7,14.8,109.4,123.5,129.7). *Vyoman* suggests vastness and *parama vyoman* is, at least in some places, the supreme space, infinite expanse of consciousness, beyond which there is nothing else. For example:

सहस्राक्षरा परमे व्योमन् ॥

ṚV I.164.41d

(Gaurī) the thousand-syllabled in the sublimest heaven,

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असच्च सच्च परमे व्योमन् ... ।

ṚV X.5.7a

Not Being and Being is in the highest heaven...

यो अस्याध्यक्षः परमे व्योमन् ... ।

ṚV X.129.7c

Whose eye controls this world in highest heaven. (All tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

The **Atharva-Veda** XI.1.30 seems to identify *uttama nāka* and *parama vyoman*. Elsewhere, time is also said to be in the supreme space: *kālaṃ tam āhuḥ parame vyoman*, "they call it time in the highest firmament (*vyoman*)" (AV XIX.53.3d).

In early Vedic literature, *kha* means a hole, an opening or an empty space such as the one in the nave of a wheel through which the axis runs, as in the following verse:

खे रथस्य खेऽनसः खे युगस्य शतक्रतो ।
अपालामिन्द्र त्रिष्पूत्व्यकृणोः सूर्यत्वचम् ॥

ṚV VIII.91.7

In the axle-hole of the chariot, in the axle-hole of the cart, in the hole of the yoke you, o wise Indra, have purified Apālā thrice and have given her a skin (shining) like the sun. (Tr. after K.F. Geldner)

Indra made room for the flowing rivers, and the canals made for the purpose are called *kha* in the **Ṛgveda**. Thus we read: *vajreṇa khāny atṛṇan nadīnām*, "with the thunderbolt (Indra) dug the beds of rivers" (ṚV II.15.3b). The openings of the body (seven higher and two lower) are also known as *kha*:

कः सप्त खानि वि ततर्द शीर्षणि कर्णाविमौ नासिके चक्षणी मुखम् ।

AV X.2.6ab

Who bored out seven apertures in his head – these ears, the nostrils, the eyes, the mouth? (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

It may be mentioned in this connexion that the glottis, i.e., the opening of the throat which, according to the degree in which it is open or closed, produces a particular sound, is termed *kha* (*kaṇṭhasya khe vivṛte saṃvṛte vā*, ṚkPrāt, XIII.1).

The **Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa** represents the sun (*āditya*) as the hole of the heaven.

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यथा खं वाऽनसः स्याद्रथस्य वैवमेतद्दिवश्छिद्रम् ।
तद्रश्मिभिः संछन्नं दृश्यते ॥

JaimUpBr I.3.6

Just as the void (hole) exists in the wheel of a cart or in a chariot, similarly it is the hole of the upper heaven. It is seen well-covered by numberless rays. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

The following passage of the **Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad** is interesting, as it presents different objects as openings (*kha*):

यदा वै पुरुषोऽस्माल्लोकात् प्रैति स वायुमागच्छति । तस्मै स तत्र विजिहीते ।
यथा रथचक्रस्य खम् । तेन स ऊर्ध्व आक्रमते । स आदित्यमागच्छति ।
तस्मै स तत्र विजिहीते । यथा लम्बरस्य खम् । तेन स ऊर्ध्व आक्रमते ।
स चन्द्रमसमागच्छति । तस्मै स तत्र विजिहीते । यथा दुन्दुभेः खम् ।
तेन स ऊर्ध्व आक्रमते । स लोकमागच्छत्यशोकमहिमम् । तस्मिन् वसति
शाश्वतीः समाः ॥

BṛUp V.10.1

Verily, when a person (*puruṣa*) departs from this world he goes to the wind. It opens out there for him like the hole of a chariot wheel. Through it he mounts higher.

He goes to the sun. It opens out there for him like the hole of a drum. Through it he mounts higher.

He goes to the moon. It opens out for him there like the hole of a kettle-drum. Through it he mounts higher.

He goes to the world that is without heat, without cold (or without sorrow, without snow). Therein he dwells eternal years. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

According to the **Nighaṇṭu** (I.2, 6), *vyoman*, a synonym of *ākāśa*, *antarikṣa* etc., also denotes the quarters (*diś*) (→*deśa*, Vol. II). In early Vedic literature, however, *diśaḥ*, the 'quarters' or 'directions' were conceived to be space. The ears of the Cosmic Puruṣa give rise to *diśaḥ* 'the quarters' (*diśaḥ śrotrāt*, ṚV X.90.14). The faculty of hearing is associated with *ākāśa* in later literature. Sound, the distinctive quality of *ākāśa*, is perceived within the space of the ear. This notion is prefigured in the Vedic tradition which connects the power of hearing with *diśaḥ*. Not only the **Ṛgveda**, but also later Vedic texts connect *diśaḥ* with the faculty of hearing. For example we read: *diśo me śrotre śritāḥ*, "the quarters abide in my hearing," (TBr III.10.8.6), and *diśo vai śrotram*, "the quarters are indeed hearing" (JaimBr II.54, ŚBr VII.5.2.20). The quarters

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came into existence from the power of hearing, which again originated from the ears of the Cosmic Puruṣa, *karṇābhyāṃ śrotram, śrotrād diśaḥ* (AitĀr II.4.1). Then once the quarters had become hearing again, they entered the ears in the bodies, *diśaḥ śrotraṃ bhūtvā karṇau prāviśan* (AitĀr II.4.2). The directions (*diśaḥ*) are unlimited, pervasive, and the support of the world. The **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** declares:

दिग्भिर्हीमे लोकाः शक्नुवन्ति स्थातुम् ।

ŚBr VI.7.1.16

By means of the quarters can these worlds exist.

तस्मादेषां लोकानामन्तरतश्च बाह्यतश्च दिशः ... ।
अपरिमिता हि दिशः ॥

ŚBr VI.5.2.7

Therefore are the quarters both inside and outside these worlds, ... for unlimited are the quarters.

The **Chāndogya Upaniṣad** (VII.25) uses the concept of *bhūman* in the sense of the fullness that permeates all the directions of space. All-encompassing space – *ākāśa* obviously includes *diśaḥ* 'the directions'. The connexion between *diś* and *ākāśa* is established in the following passage, where *ākāśa* is the lotus of the heart which is said to have the eight directions as its petals:

इदं वाव तत्पुष्करं योऽयमाकाशः ।
अस्येमाश्चतस्रो दिशश्चतस्र उपदिशो दलसँस्था आसम् ।

MaitUp VI.2

Its lotus is the same as the ether; the four quarters and the four intermediate points are its petals. (Tr. E.B. Cowell)

The notion of the totality of the quarters conceived together approximates closely to that of the concept of *ākāśa*. The most important difference between them is that *diś* is not regarded as an element, whereas *ākāśa* is.

The word *ākāśa* does not occur in the **Ṛgveda** (except in a supplementary hymn), but gained prominence in the later literature. In the sense of an opening or a free space (*avakāśa*), it is found in the Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas. The Vasus came to Agni and requested him: *ākāśaṃ naḥ kuru*, "make room for us" (AitBr III.42, tr. A.B. Keith), so that they could pass through the opening to the world of heaven. Similarly: *madhye'ṅgulyākāśaṃ karoti*, "He then makes a finger-hole in the middle" (ŚBr III.3.2.19, tr. J. Eggeling), *varīyān ākāśo'sat*

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paricaraṇāya "there may be wider space for moving about" (ŚBr IV.6.8.17, tr. J. Eggeling); *trayodaśāraṇyān ākāśeṣv ālabhate*, "thirteen wild (beasts) he seizes for each intermediate space (ŚBr XIII.5.1.15, tr. J. Eggeling); *ākāśaṃ śālāyai kuryur iti haika āhuḥ*, "some say he should make an opening in the shed" (ŚāṅkhĀr I.5, tr. A.B. Keith).

Antarikṣa, 'the intermediate space between heaven and earth', was conceived in early Vedic literature more as a region. It appears in the **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** as *ākāśa* 'free space' resulting from the separation of the heaven and the earth: *yo'ntareṇākāśa āsīt tad antarikṣam abhavad*, "the space which was between them became *antarikṣa*" (ŚBr VII.12.23). Hence, *antarikṣa* is now *ākāśa*, the sky, where a bird can fly (cf. *yathāsminn ākāśe śyeno vā suparṇo vā viparipatya śrāntaḥ*, BṛUp IV.3.20). Worth noting also is that *ākāśa*, meaning free space and the sky, is found also in the Śrauta-Sūtras.

Many Upaniṣadic ideas are found in the Brāhmaṇas in the making. The close connexion between *ākāśa* and *ātman*, frequently made in the Upaniṣads, is foreshadowed in some passages of the late Brāhmaṇas; for example, *ākāso vā ātmā* (JaimBr II.54,56), *sa ātmānam upāsīta ... ākāśātmānam*, "let him meditate on the Self, ... endowed with an etherial nature" (ŚBr X.6.3.2, tr. J. Eggeling).

Ākāśa is one of the five elements (*mahābhūtas*) that constitute the creation: *pañcemāni mahābhūtāni bhavantīti ha smāha vāliśikhāyaniḥ, pṛithivī vāyur ākāśam āpo jyotīṃṣi tāni mithaḥ saṃhitāni bhavanti*, "There are, then, five gross elements', says Vāliśikhāyani, 'the earth, wind, ether, water, light. These are united with each other" (ŚāṅkhĀr VII.22, tr. A.B. Keith, cf. AitUp III.3).

The Āraṇyakas, in the course of expounding the mystic meaning of *saṃhitā* 'conjunction', establish a correspondence between different levels of viewing *ākāśa*. With reference to the deities (*adhidaivata*), the earth is the prior form, and the heaven, the latter. Their union is *vāyu*, according to Māṇḍūkeya; *ākāśa*, according to Mākṣavya. With reference to the body (*adhyātma*), it is said that the person is egg-shaped, having two halves, which represent the prior and the latter forms and between them is *ākāśa*, which is where *prāṇa* operates (AitĀr III.1.1–2, ŚāṅkhĀr VII.4).

The concept of space as a support for the whole creation, as unlimited expanse holding within itself all the objects, is clearly found in the Upaniṣads. *Ākāśa* is there used to mean the totality of space. Yājñavalkya proclaims *ākāśa* to be the great container:

यद्ऊर्ध्वं गार्गि दिवो यदवाक् पृथिव्या यदन्तरा द्यावापृथिवी इमे यद् भूतं च

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भवच्च भविष्यच्चेत्याचक्षत आकाशे तदोतं च प्रोतं चेति ॥

BṛUp III.8.4

That, O Gārgī, which is above the sky, that which is beneath the earth, that which is between these two, sky and earth, that which people call the past and the present and the future across space is that woven, warp and woof. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

But the Upaniṣadic hierarchy of principles does not end in space. Space too, however great, is supported by *brahman*, the Ultimate Reality, which is the substratum of all things, including space. Therefore, when further questioned by Gārgī, Yājñavalkya makes it clear that space is woven, warp and woof, by the immutable *brahman* (*etasminnu khalv akṣare gārgy ākāśa otaś ca protaś ceti*, BṛUp III.8.11).

य आकाशे तिष्ठन्नाकाशादन्तरो यमाकाशो न वेद यस्याकाशः
शरीरं य आकाशमन्तरो यमयति, एष त आत्माऽन्तर्याम्यमृतः ॥

BṛUp III.7.12

He who, dwelling in space, yet is other than space, whom space does not know, whose body space is, who controls space from within – He is your soul, the Inner Controller, the Immortal. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The Upaniṣads, however, do not clearly distingish between empty space as unbounded extension and *ākāśa* as matter filling all space.

Yājñavalkya rejects the rigid line of demarcation between what is conscious and what is called insentient matter (*bhūta*) when he asserts that one who knows matter or the elements as different from the self, is repudiated by the elements (BṛUp II.4.6). No wonder then, that he calls the Supreme Self an element *mahābhūta* (in *asya mahato bhūtasya niḥśvasitam etad* ..., BṛUp II.4.10, which is the source of MaitUp VI.32).

Ākāśa, the first and the subtlest of the elements, resembles the Supreme Reality. Accordingly, it is naturally regarded as a great deity, the first of those who sustain each creature (PraUp II.2). The person is inhabited and activated by the gods:

प्रजापतिर्वा इमं पुरुषमुदस्यत तस्मिन्नेता देवता आवेशयद् ...
मूर्धन्याकाशम्, आत्मनि ब्रह्म ... ॥

ŚāṅkhĀr XI.1

Prajāpati elevated this person. In him he made these deities to dwell, ... in his head the ether, in his Self, Brahman. (Tr. A.B. Keith)

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Besides the vital breath and the mind (*prāṇa* and *manas*), *ākāśa* is an object to meditate on. *Brahman* appears as the mind and its nature is like space (*manomayaḥ ... ākāśātmā*, ChUp III.14.2). It follows that *ākāśa* is a symbol of *brahman.*

मनो ब्रह्मेत्युपासीतेत्यध्यात्ममथाधिदैवतमाकाशो ब्रह्मेत्युभयमादिष्टं भवत्यध्यात्मं चाधिदैवतं च ॥

ChUp III.18.1

The mind is to be meditated on as Brahman. This is on the personal plane. Then follows the meditation on the divine level. Space is Brahman. Both these become enjoined, the personal and the divine. (Tr. Gambhirananda)

Ākāśa is the symbol of *brahman* in the Upaniṣads and one may meditate on it as such. The **Chāndogya Upaniṣad** says:

आकाशो वाव तेजसो भूयान् । आकाशे वै सूर्याचन्द्रमसावुभौ विद्युन्नक्षत्राण्यग्निः । आकाशेनाह्वयति । आकाशेन शृणोति । आकाशेन प्रतिशृणोति । आकाशे रमते । आकाशे न रमते । आकाशे जायते । आकाशमभिजायते । आकाशमुपास्स्वेति ॥ स य आकाशं ब्रह्मेत्युपास्ते । आकाशवतो वै स लोकान् प्रकाशवतोऽसंबाधानुरुगायवतोऽभिसिध्यति । यावदाकाशस्य गतं तत्रास्य यथाकामचारो भवति य आकाशं ब्रह्मेत्युपास्ते ।

ChUp VII.12.1–2

Space (*ākāśa*), assuredly, is more than Heat. In space, verily, are both sun and moon, lightning, stars and fire. Through space one calls out, through space one hears; through space one answers. In space one enjoys himself; in space one does not enjoy himself. In space one is born; unto Space one is born. Reverence Space. He who reverences Space as Brahma he, verily, attains spacious, gleaming, unconfined, wide-extending worlds. As far as Space goes, so far he has unlimited freedom, he who reverences Space as Brahma. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

Although *brahman* baffles description, the Upaniṣads try to indicate its nature by refering to it metaphorically as *ākāśa*, which is all-pervasive, untainted, intangible and unlimited expanse. Due to their common characteristics, *brahman* is also called *ākāśa, ākāśātman, ākāśaśarīra*, as in the following passage:

अनूह्य एष परमात्मा अपरिमितोऽजोऽतर्क्योऽचिन्त्यः । एष आकाशात्मैवैष कृत्स्नक्षय एको जागर्ति । इत्येतस्मादाकाशादेष खल्विदं चेतामात्रं बोधयति ।

MaitUp VI.17

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> Incomprehensible is that supreme Soul (*ātman*), unlimited, unborn, not to be reasoned about, unthinkable – He whose soul is space (*ākāśātmā*). In the dissolution of the world He alone remains awake. From that space He, assuredly, awakes this world, which is a mass of thought. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The sacrificial fires instructed Upakośala: *prāṇo brahma kaṃ brahma khaṃ brahma*, "*Prāṇa* (the vital force) is Brahman, *ka* (Bliss) is Brahman, *kha* (Space) is Brahman" (ChUp IV.10.4, tr. Gambhirananda). Moreover, *yad vāva kaṃ tad eva khaṃ yad eva khaṃ tad eva kam*: "That which is *ka* is verily *kha* (space), and that which is *kha* is verily *ka*" (ChUp IV.10.4–5, tr. Gambhirananda). This shows that the space referred to here is different from material space and the bliss different from material happiness. There are passages in the Upaniṣads, in which, at least according to the Vedāntins, *ākāśa* means *brahman*. Śālāvatya asked Pravāhaṇa Jaivali: *asya lokasya kā gatir iti*, "what is the support of this world?" The latter replied:

> आकाश इति होवाच । सर्वाणि ह् वा इमानि भूतान्याकाशादेव समुत्पद्यन्ते ।
> आकाशं प्रत्यस्तं यन्ति । आकाशो ह्येवैभ्यो ज्यायान् । आकाशः परायणम् ॥
>
> ChUp.I.9.1
>
> Space, because all these things (moving or not moving) originate verily from Space itself, and when they die they go to Space. Since Space indeed is superior to all these, Space is the ultimate goal. (Tr. Gambhirananda)

Ākāśa offers the potentiality so that the differentiated creation, name and form, may come into existence; *ākāśo vai nāma nāmarūpayor nirvahitā*, "That which is indeed called Space, is the manifester of name and form" (ChUp VIII.14.1, tr. Gambhirananda). Of these elements, *ākāśa* is sometimes viewed as the most fundamental. It not only makes room for the other elements, but in so doing, in a sense, creates them. Centuries after this Upaniṣad was written, Swami Vivekananda expounded this idea as follows: "All matter throughout the universe is the outcome of one primal matter called Ākāsha; and all force, whether gravitation, attraction or repulsion, or life, is the outcome of one primal force called Prāṇa. Prāṇa acting on Ākāsha is creating or projecting the universe" (Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, Vol.I,pp.359–360).

The space outside a person is identified with the space within the person, namely, the space within the heart (ChUp III. 12.7–9). The text expounding this doctrine called *daharavidyā* begins thus:

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अथ यदिदमस्मिन् ब्रह्मपुरे दहरं पुण्डरीकं वेश्म दहरोऽस्मिन्नन्तराकाश-
स्तस्मिन् यदन्तस्तदन्वेष्टव्यं, तद्वाव विजिज्ञासितव्यमिति ॥

ChUp VIII.1.1

Then, in this small lotus-like dwelling that is within the city of Brahman, there is a small space. That which exists in that space is to be known. That indeed has to be enquired into for realization. (Tr. Gambhirananda)

The body is the city of *brahman*; and the heart, the lotus. In the space in the cavity of the heart is the Supreme Self realized to be identical with the individual soul. The space within the heart is not physical space; it is transcendental space, the seat of *brahman*.

The Upaniṣad makes it clear:

यावान् वा अयमाकाशस्तावानेषोऽन्तर्हृदय आकाशः । उभे अस्मिन्
द्यावापृथिवी अन्तरेव समाहिते । उभावग्निश्च वायुश्च सूर्याचन्द्रमसावुभौ
विद्युन्नक्षत्राणि । यच्चास्येहास्ति यच्च नास्ति सर्वं तदस्मिन् समाहितमिति ॥

ChUp VIII.1.3

This space within the heart is as vast as this space (outside). Within it indeed are included both heaven and earth, as also both fire and air, both sun and moon, lightning and stars. Whatever this one has here and whatever he has not, all that is included in that. (Tr. Gambhirananda)

The analogy between *brahman* and *ākāśa* is not to be understood literally. *Brahman* is not the same expanse as space. *Brahman*, the support of space, is infinite (*para ākāśāt*, BṛUp IV.4.20). The equation the Upaniṣad makes between space and *brahman* only indicates the identity of the macrocosm and the microcosm.

The space within the cavity of the heart is called *parama vyoman*. It is the same Reality that is within and in the highest heaven: *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma, yo veda nihitaṃ guhāyāṃ parame vyoman*, "Brahman is reality, knowledge and infinite. He who knows it to be concealed in the cavity of the heart and in the highest space" (TUp II.1.1, tr. after P. Deussen).

को ह्येवान्यात् कः प्राण्यात् । यदेष आकाश आनन्दो न स्यात् ।

TUp II.7

For who indeed would breathe, who would live, if there were not this Bliss in space! (Tr. R.E. Hume)

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By attaining knowledge of *brahman*, one becomes *brahman*, whose body is *ākāśa* (*ākāśaśarīraṃ brahma*, TUp I.6.2).

The **Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad** (2) represents *brahman* as divided into four quarters (*catuṣpād*): *vaiśvānara* (whose sphere of activity is the waking state), *taijasa* (whose sphere of activity is the dream state), *prājña* (whose sphere is deep sleep) and *turīya/caturtha*, the fourth, the Supreme, in which all phenomena cease. The knowledge of the fourth can be attained by successively merging the previous three into it in the said order. In Gauḍapāda's *Kārikā*, consciousness (*prājña*) is said to reside in the space within the heart (*ākāśe ca hṛdi prājñaḥ*, I.2) and to enjoy bliss (*ānandabhuk tathā prājñaḥ*, I.3).

The Upaniṣadic conception of *ākāśa* was not accepted by the heterodox schools of ancient India. The Cārvākas admit only four elements. *Ākāśa* was excluded because it is not perceptible.

The Upaniṣads view *ākāśa* 'space' as fullness, all penetrating existence. Buddhism, on the contrary, regards it as *śūnya*, i.e., as 'void' or emptiness.

In the **Majjhima Nikāya** (p.104), Rāhula is advised to practise *ākāsasama bhāvana*, that is meditation of the nature of *ākāśa*, in the sense that it should be objectless and without support. In Buddhist texts we come across the term *ākāsadhātu*, 'the element *ākāśa*'. What is this *ākāsadhātu*? The **Dhammasaṅgaṇi** regards it as a vacuum, distinct from the other four elements:

> कतमं तं रूपं आकासधातु? यो आकासो आकासगतं, अघं अघगतं, विवरो विवरगतं, असम्फुट्ठं चतूहि महाभूतेहि, इदं तं रूपं आकासधातु ।
>
> DhSaṅ p.189
>
> That which is space and belongs to space, is sky and belongs to sky, is vacuum and belongs to vacuum, and is not in contact with the four Great Phenomena – this is that form which is the element of space. (Tr. Rhys Davids)

The **Aṭṭhasālinī** explains *ākāśa* in the following way:

> न कसति, न निकसति, कसितुं वा छिन्दितुं वा भिन्दितुं वा न सक्का ति आकासो ।
>
> Aṭṭh IV.76 (p.262)
>
> 'Space' is that which is not 'scratched', not scratched off, which is not possible to scratch, cut, or break. (Tr. Pe Maung Tin)

Ākāśa is regarded as a cavity, a hole and the like. It is an empty space not occupied by an object.

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तत्थ कतमो आकासो? यो आकासो आकासगतं अघं अघगतं विवरो विवरगतं असम्फुट्ठं चतूहि महाभूतेहि - अयं वुच्चति 'आकासो' ।

Vibh pp.314–15

Therein what is space? That which is space, spatial, void, voidness, interstice, interstitial, not in contact with the four great essentials. This is called space. (Tr. P.A. Thiṭṭila)

The **Abhidharma Kośa** says: *chidram ākāśadhātvākhyam ālokatamasī kila*, "Cavity is the element space: that is called light and darkness" (AbhidhKo I.28ab, p.77, tr. S. Jha). The commentary on this extract observes that "the cavity is not deemed to be other than the light and the darkness. Hence the *ākāśadhātu* is considered to be of the nature of light and darkness" (tr. S. Jha). The **Abhidharma Samuccaya** (13) defines *ākāśa* as the negation of matter (*rūpābhāvaḥ*). It is the absence of hindrance that makes room for the manifestation of all activities. The expression *ākāsānañcāyatanam*, occurring in the **Visuddhimagga** (X.24) and elsewhere, means "the sphere of the infinitude of space."

Buddhist philosophers claim that everything is void and momentary; nothing persists or is substantial. But the concept of *śūnyatā* – void, developed diversely in different schools. The Vaibhāṣikas speak of three varieties of *asaṃskṛtadharmas*, 'uncompounded substances', one of which is *ākāśa*, considered to be an objective reality. According to the Yogācāra school, consciousness or idea alone exists. Internal awareness appears to act externally, as happens in a dream. The Mādhyamika system denies the reality of any phenomenal experience and knowledge. So, *ākāśa* has no reality according to these two systems.

According to Jaina philosophy, there are five categories, called *astikāyas*, that is, fundamental substances. They are divided into two groups, soul and non-soul. *Ākāśa* belongs to the second group (*ajīvakāya*):

अजीवकाया धर्माधर्माकाशपुद्गलाः ॥

TaSū V.1

The *astikāyas*, *dharma, adharma*, *ākāśa* and *pudgala* are the bodies of the form of 'not soul'. (Tr. K.K. Dixit)

There is another twofold classification into *mūrta* and *amūrta*, i.e. limited and formless space (cf. PkāSā 97). *Ākāśa* is defined in the following way:

आकाशन्तेऽस्मिन् द्रव्याणि स्वयं चाकाशत इत्याकाशम् । अवकाशाद्वा ।

RāVā V.1.21–22

That, in which the substances (like *jīva* etc.) are shining (along with

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their modes (*paryāya*) and that which shines itself is known as space, (*ākāśa*). Or one who provides space (to other substances is called *ākāśa*). (Tr. Sadananda)

आगासं सपदेसं तु उड्ढाधो तिरिओविय ।
खेत्तलोगं वियाणाहि अणंतजिण-दे सिदं ।

Dhav on ṢaṭĀ IV.1.3.1.4.7

The Space (*ākāśa*) is extensive and it is all pervasive as above, below and horizontal. The people should know that Lord Jina said that (space is) endless. (Tr. Sadananda)

It is said to be without any support:

आकाशमात्मप्रतिष्ठं, तस्यैवाधाराधेयत्वात् ॥

SaSi on TaSū III.1

Space rests in itself, as it is itself the support and the supported. (Tr. S.A. Jain)

Space is further classified by the Jainas as cosmic and acosmic space (*lokākāśa* and *alokākāśa*, SaSi V.12).

जीवा पुग्गलकाया धम्माधम्मा य लोगदोण्णा ।
तत्तो अणण्णमण्णं आयासं अन्तवदिरित्तं ॥

जीवाः पुद्गलकायाः धर्माधर्मौ च लोकतोऽनन्ये ।
ततोऽनन्यदन्यदाकाशमन्तव्यतिरिक्तम् ॥

PkāSā 91

Life, matter, the principle of motion and that of rest and also Time, these are not distinct from the world. But that which is the same as the world, and also distinct from it, is *Ākāśa* or space which is infinite. (Tr. A. Chakravartinayanar)

The commentary on this passage summarizes the idea thus:

Space contains the other five constituent elements of the world. The space which is co-extensive with these objects is called *lokākāśa*. But that is only a part of the real space. Beyond the *loka* there is *alokākāśa* or *anantākāśa*. This *anantākāśa* is pure space.

Ākāśa is infinite in extent, eternal and immutable, and it is not grasped by the sense-organs. It is the substratum of other fundamental categories (*ākāśam ādhāro bhavati, dharmādayas tv ādheyāḥ*, TaSūBh III.6).

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The Vedic tradition that the sky (*antarikṣa*) appeared from the navel of the cosmic Puruṣa is echoed in the **Mahābhārata** when Bhīṣma praises Kṛṣṇa by saying that his navel is the sky, *kha*, i.e. *antarikṣa* (MBh XII.47.44). In another place the same word *kha*, which normally means 'sky', is used to denote the bodily openings that contain space (*kheṣv ākāśaṃ śarīriṇām*, MBh XII.231.7d). Further on, the text goes on to enumerate the properties of *ākāśa*, that is 'elemental space', such as sound, extensiveness, intangibility, its lack of resistance and so forth (MBh XII.247.7–8).

The **Bhagavad-Gītā** regards *kha*, 'elemental space', as one of the eight divisions of the (*aparā*) *prakṛti* of Kṛṣṇa (VII.4). Kṛṣṇa says:

यथाकाशस्थितो नित्यं वायुः सर्वत्रगो महान् ।
तथा सर्वाणि भूतानि मत्स्थानीत्युपधारय ॥

BhG IX.6

As in (wide) space subsists the mighty wind blowing (at will) ever and everywhere, so do all contingent beings subsist in Me: so must you understand it. (Tr. R.C. Zaehner)

The analogy of *ākāśa* serves to indicate the all-pervasive, yet ever unaffected nature of the Self:

यथा सर्वगतं सौक्ष्म्यादाकाशं नोपलिप्यते ।
सर्वत्रावस्थितो देहे तथात्मा नोपलिप्यते ॥

BhG XIII.32

Just as omnipresent space is untainted by virtue of its subtlety, so too the omnipresent Self is untainted within the body. (Tr. M. Dyczkowski)

The Purāṇas also symbolize the Self as space '*kha*', (BhāgPur III.5.32). Moreover, space (*ākāśa*) is the body of Viṣṇu (ViPur I.14.32), as it is of Śiva (ŚPur II.2.41.20 etc.). At the same time, space is an attribute of the deity. The conch in the hand of Viṣṇu symbolizes *kha* 'space' (VDhPur III.85.17) and hence his mastery over the celestial sphere.

We turn now to Āyurveda for the physiological aspects of *ākāśa*. Āyurveda considers the five elements, self, mind, time and *diś* to be substances (CarSam SūSthā I.48). *Ākāśa* abounds in the attributes of *sattva* (SuSam ŚāSthā I.20). The physical body is a combination of the five elements and is an abode of consciousness (CarSam ŚāSthā IV.6). The contribution of *ākāśa* to the constitution of the body is specified in the **Caraka Saṃhitā**: *tatrāsyākāśātmakaṃ śabdaḥ śrotraṃ lāghavaṃ saukṣmyaṃ vivekaś ca*, "Those derived from *ākāśa*

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are sound, the auditory organ, lightness, minuteness, and distinction (ŚāSthā IV.12, tr. P.V. Sharma, cf. SuSam ŚāSthā I.19). The pores in the body are filled with *ākāśa* (*tasya puruṣasya viyat suṣirāṇi*, CarSam ŚāSthā V.5), while *kha* denotes the pores themselves:

यथा स्वभावतः खानि मृणालेषु बिसेषु च ।
धमनीनां तथा खानि रसो यैरुपचीयते ॥

SuSam ŚāSthā IX.10

The Dhamanis (vital channels) have got pores in their sides through which they carry the Rasa (lymph-chyle) throughout the organism, like the filaments and fibres of water-lily and lotus. (Tr. K.L. Bhisagratna)

There is a correspondence between outer and inner space:

आकाशं खानि ते पान्तु ... ।

SuSam SūSthā V.28c

May infinite Ether defend the space which is imprisoned in thy body. (Tr. K.L. Bhisagratna)

Although all the five elements constitute physical objects, some objects display the characteristics of a certain element more than those of others. According to the **Caraka Saṃhitā**:

मृदुलघुसूक्ष्मश्लक्ष्णशब्दगुणबहुलान्याकाशात्मकानि, तानि मार्दवसौषिर्य-लाघवकराणि ॥

CarSam SūSthā XXVI.11

Dravyas having predominance in the properties of soft, minute, smooth, and sound are *ākāśīya* (constituted predominantly by *ākāśa bhūta*. They exert actions of softening, hollowing and lightness. (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

According to the **Bṛhat Saṃhitā**, a person may possess one or more natural characteristics of earth, water, fire, air, ether, the immortals, the mortals, demons, devils and beasts (LXVIII.108). Thus:

खप्रकृतिर्निपुणो विवृतास्यः शब्दगतेः कुशलः सुशिराङ्गः ।

BṛSam LXVIII.111ab

A man born with the characteristic of ether becomes proficient in fine arts, open-mouthed (or has an expanded or large mouth), expert

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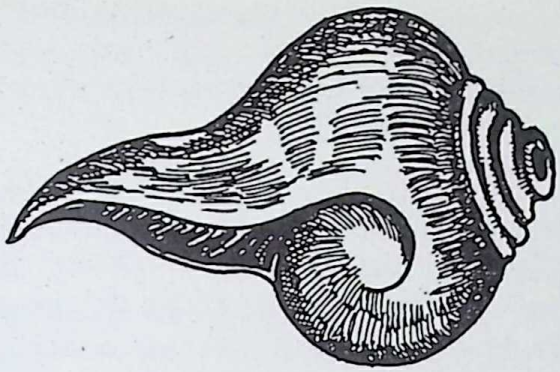

Figure 10: *Śaṅkha*, a symbol of *ākāśa*

in grammar and speech (or the *Sāstras*) and possesses limbs that have beautiful veins. (Tr. M.R. Bhat)

Similarly, the **Saṅgīta-Ratnākara** maintains that the body obtains "sound, the faculty of hearing, porosity, individuation, intelligence, and hollowness from space" (SR I.2.57, tr. P.L. Sharma).

Many Indian conceptions of space originate from the necessity of finding a support and container for creation and *ākāśa* as 'unlimited space' and continuum fulfils this requirement. Again, *ākāśa* is not just a vacuum, a mere absence of objects, but a substance which is conceived to be a physical as the other for gross elements. It corresponds to the ancient Greek conception of space as a gas-like 'ether'. In India it is thought to be the material medium of sound.

The exponents of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system maintain that since no other substance is capable of being the inherent cause of sound, the existence of *ākāśa* 'ether' is established as the substratum of sound by a process of elimination (*pariśeṣāl liṅgam ākāśasya*, VaiśSū II.1.25–27). According to them, *ākāśa* 'ether', like time, the soul and *diś* 'space', is omnipresent (and thus is conjoined with all limited things) and unlimited. It is also partless (*niravayava)*.

विभवान् महानाकाशस्तथा चात्मा ॥

VaiśSū VII.1.22

Ether, because of its vast extent, is immensely large. Such also is the Self.

दिक्कालावाकाशं च क्रियावद्वैधर्म्म्यान्निष्क्रियाणि ॥

VaiśSū V.2.21

Space, Time and Ether are inactive because they are essentially different from that which is active.

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Ākāśa 'ether' is all-pervasive and hence is also eternal and imperceptible.

शब्दसंयोगविभवाच्च सर्वगतम् ॥
अव्यूहाविष्टम्भविभुत्वानि चाकाशधर्माः ॥

NySū IV.2.21–22

(*Ākāśa*) is all-pervasive because (it is the substratum of) sound, because (it is) conjoined (with all things) and because of (its) extension. The attributes of *ākāśa* are freedom from change, penetrability and pervasion. (Tr. M. Dyczkowski)

Ākāśa has no form and is not an object; its only similarity with the other four elements is that it has a distinctive quality which is perceptible to one of the senses. "As the distinguishing feature of sound is common to all *Ākāśa*, this is regarded as one only" (VaiśSūBh, tr. G.N. Jha, p.129); although the outer ear differs from person to person.

Not *ākāśa*, but *diś*, in the Vaiśeṣika system is space. It is not an element, but the efficient cause of the notion of spatial distance and nearness. Like *ākāśa*, *diś* too is one, eternal, inactive and the largest possible expanse:

दूरान्तिकादिधीहेतुरेका नित्या दिगुच्यते ॥
उपाधिभेदादेकापि प्राच्यादिव्यवहारभाक् ।

Bhāpari 46cd–47ab

The cause of the notion of distance, nearness, etc. is called space. It is one and eternal. Although one, it is spoken of as the east etc. owing to its different limiting adjuncts. (Tr. Madhavananda)

According to Raghunātha Śiromaṇi, it is superfluous to admit *ākāśa* and *diś* as substances when *Īśvara* is admitted.

It has been said in the **Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra** that "the distinguishing feature of *ākāśa* is that it enters into (all empty spaces) and it quits (them when they are filled)" (*niṣkramaṇaṃ praveśanam ity ākāśasya liṅgam*, II.1.20). This is alleged to be the view of Sāṃkhya. The **Sāṃkhya-Sūtra** (*dikkālāv ākāśādibhyaḥ*, II.12) is somewhat ambiguous. According to Aniruddha Miśra the Sūtra appears to include *diś* and *kāla* in *ākāśa*. According to Vijñānabhikṣu, however, eternal *diś* and *kāla* are of the nature of *ākāśa* and limited time and space are generated from *ākāśa* through the conjunction of limiting adjuncts.

The **Yoga-Sūtra** instructs one to turn inwards. By practising *saṃyama* (i.e. concentration ranging from *dhāraṇā* to *dhyāna* and *samādhi*) on the relation between the ear and *ākāśa*, one obtains supernormal hearing (YSū III.41). The **Vyāsa Bhāṣya** on this Sūtra says:

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सर्वश्रोत्राणामाकाशं प्रतिष्ठा सर्वशब्दानाञ्च । ...
तच्चैतदाकाशस्य लिङ्गमनावरणं चोक्तम् । तथा अमूर्तस्याप्यन्यत्रानावरण-दर्शनात् विभुत्वमपि प्रख्यातमाकाशस्य ।

YSūBh III.41

All powers of hearing and all sounds abide in *Ākāśa* .... Absence of obstruction (void) is also mentioned as its (*Ākāśa's*) *liṅga* or indicator. Moreover it is found that a formless thing or a thing intangible is not obstructed by anything (as it can stay anywhere); thus the all-pervasiveness of *Ākāśa* is established. (Tr. H. Aranya)

The Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsakas maintain that *ākāśa* is a substance which is eternal, indivisible, all-pervasive, and perceptible. In this system, sound is a substance, not a quality of *ākāśa*. The Prābhākaras do not consider *ākāśa* to be perceptible. Like the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, they maintain that it is the substratum of sound and that its existence can only be inferred, not directly perceived.

In the Upaniṣads, the word *ākāśa* has a variety of meanings. This makes way for ambiguity, which is sought to be removed in the **Brahma-Sūtra**. But this text is, because of its extreme brevity, often unintelligible without the help of the commentaries. Śaṅkara interprets the word *ākāśa* found in **Chāndogya Upaniṣad** III.8.4.11 (already cited) to mean the *avyakta* 'unmanifest', which is also called *māyā (tad etad avyaktaṃ kvacid ākāśaśabdanirdiṣṭam*, "This thing, *avyakta*, is sometimes denoted by the word *ākāśa*", ŚBh on BrSū I.4.3).

He refutes a possible objection that the word *kha* in **Chāndogya Upaniṣad** III.18.1 (cited above) denotes material space – *itaretaraviśeṣitau tu kaṃkhaṃśabdau sukhātmakaṃ brahma gamayataḥ*: "But as the words *ka* (bliss) and *kha* (space) qualify each other, they indicate *brahman* whose nature is bliss" (ŚBh on BrSū I.2.15).

Ākāśa, which is said (in ChUp I.9.1, cited above) to be the ultimate goal of everything, denotes *brahman*, says the **Brahma-Sūtra** (*ākāśas talliṅgāt*: "*Ākāśa* (denotes *brahman* because it possesses) the characteristic feature (of the latter)", I.1.22 or 23). The *prima facie* view that elemental space is meant here, is refuted by the commentators, because there are other passages in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads that maintain that the largest possible dimension can only be ascribed to *brahman*, which is the origin of all things, including space. Besides, elemental space cannot be regarded as the origin of sentient beings (BrSūBh on I.1.22, ŚrīBh on I.1.23) or the ultimate goal of life.

Again, *ākāśa*, which is said to make name and form manifest (ChUp VIII.14.1, cited above) must also be *brahman*. It is not elemental space, as claimed by the opponents, because the Upaniṣad itself in the said pas-

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sage proclaims that these names and forms are contained within *brahman* (*te yadantarā tad brahma*). Moreover, the reality which makes manifest name and form must itself be beyond them (BrSūBh on I.3.41). In another passage, the same Upaniṣad speaks of the manifestation of name and form from *brahman: hantāham imās tisro devatā anena jīvenātmanānupraviśya nāmarūpe vyākaravāṇi*, "Let it be that now, by entering into these three gods, in the form of the soul of each individual being, I shall clearly manifest name and form" (ChUp VI.3.2, tr. Gambhirananda). So, arising from the Supreme Self, space was first to assume name and form as *ākāśa*.

The *daharādhikaraṇa* of the **Brahma-Sūtra** (I.3.14–21) establishes the identity of the small space in the lotus of the heart (ChUp VIII.1.1) with *brahman*. It does this by examining and rejecting the possibility that the passages in the Upaniṣads which refer to it in those terms are not concerned either with elemental space or the individual soul which in other passages is said to reside there.

There are passages in the Upaniṣads which identify the three types of space, namely, that outside a person, within a person and within the heart (cf. ChUp III.12.7–9). Śaṅkara raises and solves the question of their identity as follows:

> कथमेकस्य सत आकाशस्य त्रिधाभेदः? इति उच्यते – बाह्येन्द्रियविषये जागरितस्थाने नभसि दुःखबाहुल्यं दृश्यते; ततोऽन्तःशरीरे स्वप्नस्थानभूते मन्दतरं दुःखं भवति ... हृदयस्थे पुनर् नभसि न कञ्चन कामं कामयते न कञ्चन स्वप्नं पश्यति; अतः सर्वदुःखनिवृत्तिरूपमाकाशं सुषुप्तस्थानम् । अतो युक्तमेकस्यापि त्रिधा भेदान्वाख्यानम् ।
>
> ŚBh on ChUp III.12.9
>
> How can the space, which is one, be divided into three? The answer is this: (when a person is in) the space perceived by the outer senses during the waking state, (he) is seen to have much sorrow. As compared with that, the sorrow is less for a seer of dreams who is in the space inside the body, which is the place for dreams. Again, in the space within the heart, 'one does not desire anything and does not see any dreams' (Mā.5). Hence the place of deep sleep is the space that is free from all kinds of sorrow. Therefore, it is reasonable to speak of a three-fold division of the one space. (Based on the tr. by Gambhirananda)

In order to establish absolute monism, Gauḍapāda applies the analogy of space. The Supreme Self is said to be like *ākāśa* 'space', because both are subtle, without parts and all-pervasive. Space, one and indivisible, is also the space enclosed in a jar. When the jar is broken, the space enclosed in the jar merges

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into the great expanse of space. Similarly, the Supreme Self is manifested as the individual soul, without being really affected thereby, and the individual soul, when liberated, merges into the Supreme Self (MāṇḍKā III.4). Thus Gauḍapāda writes:

आकाशस्य न भेदोऽस्ति तद्वज्जीवेषु निर्णयः ॥

MāṇḍKā III.6cd

There is no multiplicity in space. Such also is the definite conclusion with regard to individual beings. (Tr. Gambhirananda)

नाकाशस्य घटाकाशो विकारावयवौ यथा ।
नैवात्मनः सदा जीवो विकारावयवौ तथा ॥

MāṇḍKā III.7

As the space within a jar is neither a transformation nor a part of space (as such), so an individual being is never a transformation nor a part of the Supreme Self. (Tr. Gambhirananda)

The **Pañcadaśī** uses the analogy of *ghaṭākāśa* 'space enclosed by a jar', *mahākāśa* 'all-embracing space', *jalākāśa* 'the sky reflected in water', and *meghākāśa* 'the sky reflected in water particles forming a cloud' to illustrate the four kinds of consciousness:

कूटस्थो ब्रह्म जीवेशावित्येवं चिच्चतुर्विधा ।
घटाकाशमहाकाशौ जलाकाशाभ्रखे यथा ॥

Pañcad VI.18

The self as absolute consciousness is spoken of as the transcendent (*kūṭastha*), Brahman, the living being (*jīva*) and the Lord (Īśvara), just as, for instance, *ākāśa* (space) is called 'pot-space', 'all embracing space', 'space conditioned by water' and 'the space of a cloudy sky'. (Tr. Swahananda)

The concept of *ākāśa* is used in the **Laghu Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha** and **Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha**, also called **Vāsiṣṭha Rāmāyaṇa**, to establish non-duality as the ultimate truth. The words *ākāśa*, *kha* and *vyoman* are used synonymously. There is a story of Ākāśaja Vipra (YVās III.2), who is born of only *ākāśa* and whose nature is like *ākāśa*. Having no *karman*, he is beyond death. He represents *cidākāśa*, space of pure consciousness (*eṣa śuddhacidākāśo vijñānaghana ātataḥ* (III.2.40cd).

Our mind is drawn to the outside world through the bodily openings of the sense organs. The world appears to us to be real in ordinary perception. But,

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sarvam ākāśatām eti nityam antarmukhasthiteḥ, "for one whose mind is always turned inward everything becomes void" (LYVās Upaśamaprakaraṇa VII.23c).

Moreover, apart from words like *paramākāśa* amd *parākāśa* (both meaning 'supreme space or sky'), *jīvākāśa* and *brahmavyoma* (meaning 'the void of the individual soul' and 'the void of *brahman* respectively) etc., the **Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha** uses three separate terms: *bhūtākāśa*, *cittākāśa* and *cidākāśa*. *Ākāśa* primarily means *bhūtākāśa* 'elemental space'. When the mind and consciousness are metaphorically identified with *ākāśa*, they are called *cittākāśa* and *cidākāśa*, respectively. The **Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha** defines these terms in the following way:

सबाह्याभ्यन्तरस्थो यः सत्तासत्तावबोधकः ।
व्यापी समस्तभूतानां चिदाकाशः स उच्यते ॥
सर्वभूतहितः श्रेष्ठो यः कालकलनात्मकः ।
येनेदमाततं सर्वं चित्ताकाशः स उच्यते ॥
दशदिङ्मण्डलाभोगैरव्युच्छिन्नवपुर्हि यः ।
भूतात्मासौ य आकाशः पवनाब्दादिसंश्रयः ॥

YVās III.97.16–18

What is inside as well as outside, what makes one know (both) existence and non-existence (and) what pervades all beings, is called *cidākāśa* 'the space of consciousness'. What conduces to the welfare of all beings, what is most excellent, what impels time, and that by which everything is extended, is called *cittākāśa* 'the space of the mind'. What has its body of uninterrupted extension in the circuit of the ten directions, what supports the wind, the clouds, and the like, is elemental space.

Of these three types of space, *cidākāśa* is far superior to the other two; it is the supreme void, pure consciousness free from objects. It is said, therefore,

चित्ताकाशं चिदाकाशमाकाशञ्च तृतीयकम् ।
द्वाभ्यां शून्यतरं विद्धि चिदाकाशं वरानने ॥

LYVās Utpattiprakaraṇa II.38

O beautiful faced lady (Līlā), you should know the void of the form of *citta* and that of consciousness (*cit*) and the third (that is, the physical void). Of the two (*bhūtākāśa* and *cittākāśa*) the void of consciousness is more perfect (*śūnyataram*). (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

All the manifestations that appear out of the void of conciousness are not real in themselves, they have their real existence in their essence, the void of consciousness. "Formless, without beginning or end, all there is the one void of

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consciousness" (*anākāram anādyantam ekam cidvyoma kevalam*, YVās VI (II). 142.15cd).

Vyoman is not a negative concept, it is not the void of nothingness; on the contrary, it is the fullness that encompasses everything.

> जगतां यत्र लक्षाणि न भवन्त्युद्भवन्ति च ।
> तच्छून्यमुच्यते व्योम धिक् पाण्डित्यमखण्डितम् ॥
> व्योमन्येव प्रलीयन्ते व्योमतः प्रोद्भवन्ति च ।
> गच्छतोन्मत्ततामेतामीश्वरान्यभिदा कृता ॥
>
> YVās VI(II).116.25–26
>
> It is in the *vyoman* that millions of objects belonging to the world have their being and from which they emerge. When this *vyoman* is called *śūnya*, a void without any content, it is merely pseudo scholarship. Fie upon such a scholarship. They get dissolved in *vyoman*, get their rise in *vyoman*. Therefore, those who make a distinction between *vyoman* and the Lord are insane. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

The Āgamas and Tantras have a predilection for the words *kha* and *vyoman*, though other synonyms like *nabhas*, *gagana* and *viyat* are also used for denoting space. As in the early Vedic literature, *vyoman* connotes vastness; *vyāpakatvād ameyatvād vyoma ity abhidhīyate*, "*vyoman* is so called because of its all-pervasiveness and immeasurability" (RauĀ vp X.10cd).

Vyoman is regarded as a *tattva*, as one of the five elements. Its distinctive quality is sound and it provides space (MṛgĀ vp XII.19–20). Unlike the other four elements, it conflicts with none of them. Space is present in all beings (MṛgĀ vp 42). In the Tantras, various colours and geometrical diagrams are assigned to the *tattvas*. Space is said to be transparent (*svacchaṃ viyat*, ŚāTil I.21c). It is represented by a circle (*vṛttaṃ divas tat*, ŚāTil I.23). The *bīja* (the seed syllable embodying the power of the *tattva*) of *ākāśa* is *haṃ*.

The Tāntric system of worship and meditation is connected with the Yogic concept of *cakras*, conceived as lotus flowers, in the human body. The five elements that constitute the macrocosm also constitute the body, the microcosm. Each of the five elements is said to predominate in a particular part of the body. *Ākāśa* predominates in the uppermost part of the body beginning from the region of the throat. According to a standard Tāntric scheme this region corresponds to the fifth of six yogic centres, positioned along the vertical axis of the body symbolized as wheels (*cakra*) or lotuses. The wheel of purity (*viśuddhi cakra*) is located at the base of the throat and described in the following verse:

> विशुद्धाख्यं कण्ठे सरसिजममलं धूमधूम्रावभासं

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स्वरैः सर्वैः शोणैर्दलपरिलसितैर्दीपितं दीप्तबुद्धेः ।
समास्ते पूर्णेन्दुप्रथिततमनभो मण्डलं वृत्तरूपं
हिमच्छायानागोपरिलसिततनोः शुक्लवर्णाम्बरस्य ॥

ŚTaCi VI.29

In the throat is the Lotus called Viśuddha, which is pure and of a smoky purple hue. All the (sixteen) shining vowels on its (sixteen) petals, of a crimson hue, are distinctly visible to him whose mind (Buddhi) is illumined. In the pericarp of this lotus there is the Ethereal Region, circular in shape and white like the full Moon. On an elephant white as snow is seated the Bīja of Ambara (the seed syllable of space), who is white of colour. (Tr. A. Avalon)

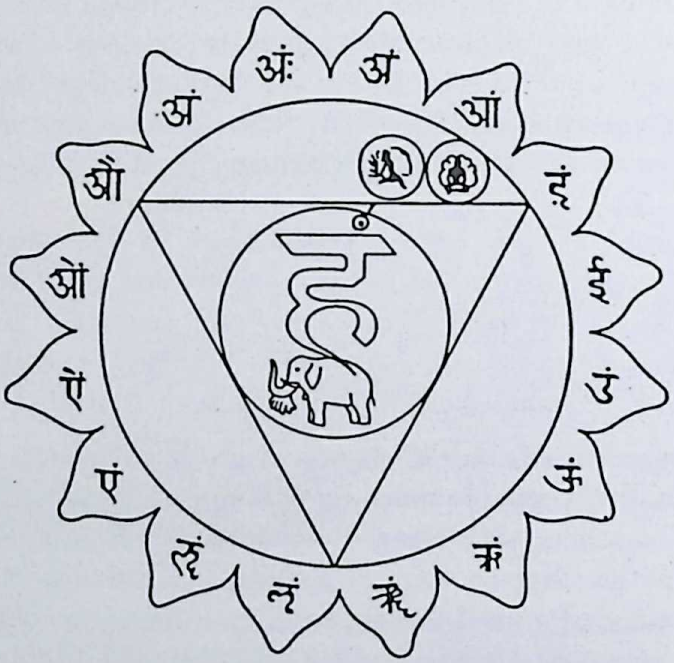

Figure 11: *Viśuddhi cakra: ha-bīja* for *ākāśa*

In the course of meditation, each element is dissolved into the next higher element beginning from the grossest, namely, earth. So, in *viśuddhi cakra* the air element, which has already absorbed the other three elements in the said way, is dissolved into the subtlest element, that is *ākāśa*. This is also the order of dissolution.

The **Śāradā-Tilaka** (VII.9–14) describes a symbolic tree of letters. Supreme consciousness (*parā saṃvid*) is its seed, *bindu* and *nāda* (the Drop and Sound) are its two tap roots, and its fruits are the letters of space (*ākāśārṇaphalair namram*, VII.12a). A *viyadyantra* 'diagram of space' is also described in this text (VII.53). The **Netra Tantra** speaks of *śūnyapañcaka* 'pentad of void':

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खमनन्तं तु जन्माख्यं नाभौ व्योम द्वितीयकम् ।
तृतीयं तु हृदिस्थाने चतुर्थं बिन्दुमध्यतः ॥
नादाख्यं तु ... ।

NT VII.27–28a

The void located in the root support (*mūlādhāra*) is immense like Ananta, the support of the earth, it supports the universe. The second void is located in the navel, the third is located in the heart and the fourth void is located in the centre of *bindu* and the fifth is the void which gives space to *nāda*, the primal sound. (Tr. H.N Chakravarty)

In order to realize the Ultimate Reality, Supreme consciousness (*parā saṃvid*), one has to transcend matter. The finest matter, *ākāśa*, is a means to this end. If one concentrates on *ākāśa*, a symbol of supreme consciousness, as void, one can gradually comprehend the infinite void of supreme consciousness. One has to grasp the nature of void and then enter into it. This is an important way of meditation propounded in the Āgamic texts:

निजदेहे सर्वदिक्कं युगपद्भावयेद्वियत् ।
निर्विकल्पमनास्तस्य वियत् सर्वं प्रवर्तते ॥
सर्वं देहगतं द्रव्यं वियद्व्याप्तं मृगेक्षणे ।
विभावयेत्ततस्तस्य भावना सा स्थिरा भवेत् ॥
नित्ये निराश्रये शून्ये व्यापके कलनोज्झिते ।
बाह्याकाशे मनः कृत्वा निराकाशं समाविशेत् ॥

ViBhai 43,47,128

If in one's body, one contemplates over *śūnya* (spatial vacuity) in all directions simultaneously (i.e. without succession) without any thought-construct, he experiences vacuity all round (and is identified with the vast expanse of consciousness).

O gazelle-eyed one, (if the aspirant is incapable of *śūnyabhāva* immediately), let him contemplate over the constituents of his body like bone, flesh, etc. as pervaded with mere vacuity. (After this practice), his *bhāvanā* (contemplation) of vacuity will become steady, (and at last he will experience the light of consciousness).

One should fix his mind on the external space which is eternal, without support, void, omnipresent, devoid of limitation. (By this practice) he will be absorbed in non-space. (Tr. J. Singh)

Meditation on *ākāśa* was taught in the Upaniṣads. Similarly, the **Vijñāna Bhairava** teaches that meditation on the inner space within the middle channel

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(*madhyanāḍī*) that runs along the axis of the body and in the lotus of the heart is conducive to the revelation of supreme consciousness (35.49). One may meditate on the Self in the form of the void (*vyomākāra*), unlimited in every direction, as a result of which the power of consciousness (*citi śakti*) reveals itself (ViBhai 92). The commentator observes that in this case 'void' means 'formless', not 'non-existent' (*na tu tuccham*). The void is not a mere vacuum. The power of the Lord is a void in which consciousness finds a substratum. This power is beyond the limitations of space and time (ViBhai 14). Thus, to one who is not sufficiently enlightened, the infinite void appears to be the stupor of deep sleep, while an advanced *yogin* experiences it as full of consciousness.

तदा तस्मिन् महाव्योम्नि प्रलीनशशिभास्करे ।
सौषुप्तपदवन् मूढः प्रबुद्धः स्यादनावृतः ॥

SpKā I.25

Then in that great sky, when the sun and moon dissolve away, the dull minded (*yogi* is cast down) into a state like that of deep sleep, the awakened however remains lucid. (Tr. M. Dyczkowski)

Khecara literally means one who moves in space. This space is not elemental space, but the supreme space of consciousness, *paracidākāśa*. Śiva is *khecara*, the Sky Farer and his state is the Gesture of the Sky Farer – *khecarī mudrā*. According to the **Śiva-Sūtra**: *vidyāsamutthāne svābhāvike khecarī śivāvasthā*, "when the knowledge innately inherent in one's own nature arises, (that is) Śiva's state – (the gesture of) the one who wanders in the Sky of Consciousness" (ŚiSū II.5, tr. M. Dyczkowski).

Parama vyoman, literally 'the supreme sky', an expression well-known in the Vedas, recurs also in Āgamic literature. It is defined as the highest, transcendental space: *māyātītaṃ paraṃ vyoma sāñjanaṃ tv aparaṃ smṛtam*, "the supreme void is beyond *māyā* while (the sky), which is tainted (with Māyā), is said to be the inferior one" (RauĀ vp X.51ab). The **Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā** regards the *parama vyoman* as the supreme abode of Viṣṇu which is supported by the thousand-spoked wheel of Sudarśana (AhSam VIII.52).

The concept of *parama vyoman* is clarified in the following extract:

शुद्धा पूर्वोदिता सृष्टिर्या सा व्यूहादिभेदिनी ।
सुदर्शनाख्यात् सङ्कल्पात् तस्या एव प्रभोज्ज्वला ॥
ज्ञानानन्दमयी स्त्याना देशभावं व्रजत्युत ।
स देशः परमं व्योम निर्मलं पुरुषात् परम् ॥
निःसीमसुखसन्तानमनवद्यमनाकुलम् ।
तत्रानन्दमया भोगा लोकाश्चानन्दलक्षणाः ॥
ज्ञानानन्दमया देहा मुक्तानां भावितात्मनाम् ।

AhSam VI.21–24ab

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The pure creation which we have spoken about before is differentiated into (a series of) emanations (*vyūha*) and the like. From the desire of Sudarśana its brilliant rays consisting of knowledge and bliss become extended and assume the form of space. That space, the highest *vyoman* is free from impurity and transcends *puruṣa*. It is a limitless flow of happiness, free from all blemishes and unmixed with other elements. The experiences there are blissful and the regions are made of bliss. The bodies of liberated souls who are (there) absorbed in the truth of the self consist of knowledge and bliss. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

Manifestation in the Arts

As we have already noted, the element *ākāśa* is the substratum of sound. All sound, including musical, is inherent in it. The articulation of sound in the body is possible because of the space within the body. From this point of view, the **Aitareya Āraṇyaka** (III.2.5) says that the body is a sound-producing organism akin to the *vīṇā*, a musical instrument. Indeed, the *vīṇā* is essentially an imitation of the body which produces musical sound (cf. ŚāṅkhĀr VIII.9). The same idea is also found in the **Nāṭya-Śāstra** (XXXIV.30–32), which speaks of musical notes as originating from the bodily lute (cf. NārŚik I.6.1–2). The musical notes are first produced in space within the body and then projected outwards, they inhere in external *ākāśa* and are perceived in the *ākāśa* in the cavity of the ear. The **Mahābhārata** says:

षड्ज ऋषभगान्धारौ मध्यमः पञ्चमस्तथा ।
धैवतश्चापि विज्ञेयस्तथा चापि निषादकः ॥
एष सप्तविधः प्रोक्तो गुण आकाशलक्षणः ।

MBh XII.177.36–37ab

(The seven notes called) Ṣaḍja, Ṛṣabha, Gāndhāra, Madhyama, Dhaivata, Pañcama and Niṣāda are the seven fold property which characterizes space.

The **Saṅgīta-Ratnākara** deals with the human body from both physiological and psychological points of view. It recommends meditation on the *cakras* as an aid to the cultivation of music. The *Viśuddhi cakra* (located in the region of the throat) is particular important in this respect. It is called *bhāratīsthāna*, the place of Sarasvatī, and is conceived to be a lotus with sixteen petals on which the sixteen vowels are located. The seven musical notes are placed on the ninth to the fifteenth petal of this *cakra* (SR I.2.129–130).

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विशुद्धेरष्टमादीनि दलान्यष्टौ श्रितानि तु ॥
दद्युर्गीतादिसंसिद्धिं षोड़शं तद्विनाशकम् ।

SR I.2.141

In the 'cycle of purity' (*viśuddhi-cakra*) contemplation on eight petals from the eighth onwards leads to success in singing and the other (musical arts), while the sixteenth petal is destructive for this purpose. (Tr. R.K. Shringy & P.L. Sharma)

Vyoma is the name of a particular *sāman* in the **Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa** (II.88). Instructing how one should sing a *sāman*, the **Nāradīya Śikṣā** says, *samaṃ sāmāni gāyeta vyomni śyenagatir yathā*, "the singing of a *sāman* should be smooth like the gait of a hawk in the sky" (I.6.15, tr. U.R. Bhise).

Ākāśa as space, unbounded expanse, contains all objects within itself. As the void, it allows things to become manifest by providing space for all things, including all art forms in general. *Ākāśa* manifests name and form, be it in dance or drama, architecture or sculpture. A void is a prerequisite of creation. Similarly, all creative activities have to start with a void. The void of the background imparts depth to a portrait. No dance movement would be possible without free space. Whatever we perceive, we perceive it in space. It is in space that we perceive all art forms.

In a dance performance *hastas* (gestures) are used to indicate various things including *ākāśa* (cf. VDhPur III.33.64). A variety of the hand pose called *svastika* indicates the sky (*kha*) says the **Nāṭya-Śāstra**:

स्वस्तिकविच्युतिकरणाद् दिशो घनाः खं वनं समुद्राश्च ।
ऋतवो मही तथान्यद्विस्तीर्णं चाभिनेयं स्यात् ॥

NŚ IX.133

(The two hands) separated in the *svastika* gesture indicate the waters, clouds, the sky, forests, the sea, the seasons, the earth and any other thing of great size that may have to be enacted. (Tr. K. Bhattacharya)

The stage is a bounded space where the drama is enacted. The scenarios are covered and uncovered one after another. Similarly, *ākāśa*, 'space', is the stage where the drama of the creation and dissolution of the world is enacted. *Ākāśa*, the first element to manifest out of the Supreme Self, makes room for the appearance of all the subsequent things. It is thus the prologue of creation. Abhinavagupta is thinking this when he says:

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संसारनाट्यनिर्माणे याऽवकाशविधानतः ।
पूर्वरङ्गायते व्योममूर्त्तिं तां शाङ्करीं नुमः ॥

AbhiBhā on NŚ V.1

We worship that spatial body of Śiva which plays the role of the prelude (*pūrvaraṅga*) in the creation of the cosmic drama by supplying space (for the same). (Tr. P.L. Sharma)

The expression *ākāśe* is used in Sanskrit dramas "as a stage direction when a character on the stage asks questions to someone not on the stage and listens to an imaginary speech supposed to be a reply, which is usually introduced by the words *kiṃ bravīṣi, kiṃ kathayasi* etc. ... This is a contrivance used by poets to avoid the introduction of a fresh character, and this is largely used in the species of dramatic composition called *bhāṇa* where only one character conducts the whole play by a copious use of *ākāśabhāṣita* (i.e. soliloquy)" (V.S.Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*). *Ākāśavacana* is the name of the device used in dramas for indicating words from an invisible (off the stage) source in the **Nāṭya-Śāstra**:

दूरस्थाभाषणं यत् स्यादशरीरनिवेदनम् ॥
परोक्षान्तरितं वाक्यमाकाशवचनं तु तत् ।

NŚ XXV.86cd–87ab

Addressing from a distance, speaking of an incorporeal (source) (and) speeches to/from a hidden (i.e. off the stage), invisible (person) is (known as) *ākāśavacana.* (Tr. K. Bhattacharya)

The Supreme Space in the cavity of the heart is often called *guhā* – 'the cave' – in the Upaniṣads (MuṇḍUp II.1.8, 2.1, TUp II.1.1, ŚvUp III.1, KaṭhUp I.2.12,20;3.1 etc.). It is the inmost recess in the heart where the Supreme Self is realized to be identical with the individual soul. *Guhā*, the cave, is a hidden, sacred, space where Ultimate Reality can be realized. In accord with the correspondence between what is within and what is outside the body, caves and cave temples correspond to the inner space, the cavity of the heart. In all temples, the inner sanctuary (*garbhagṛha*) represents the Supreme Space in the cavity of the heart into which the devotee enters from the outer space through the *ākāśa* 'openings' in the form of the gates of the temple. Within the sanctuary, an image of the deity is established, normally situated on an open lotus which is circular (and a circle is a diagram representing *ākāśa* in the Tantras).

Viṣṇu, the all-pervasive god, holds in his hand a conch, a symbol of *ākāśa* (*kha*):

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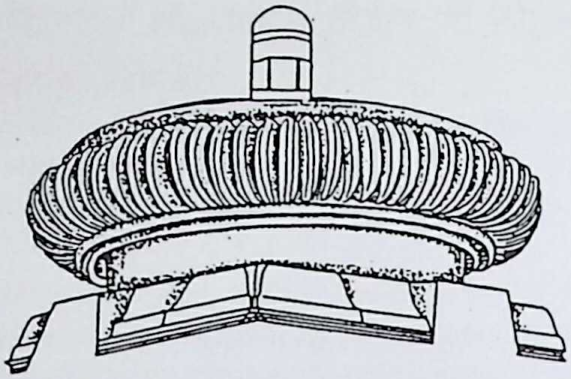

Figure 12: *Ākāśaliṅga* above *āmalaka* as crowning of temple spire

खं विजानीहि देवस्य करे शङ्खो महाभुजः ।
चक्रं जानीहि पवनं गदां तेजस्तथा विभोः ॥

VDhPur III.85.17

Oh elongated-armed, the conch in the hand of the god should be known as the sky, the disk (*cakra*) as air, and the mace (*gadā*) as the flaming brilliance of the all-pervading. (Tr. D.C. Bhattacharya)

The five elements which are assigned to five parts of the human body are represented in temple architecture. The sanctum is said to symbolize the universe constituted by the five elements. The temple itself rises to the sky, to the space outside, symbolizing the ascent of consciousness to the highest level marked by the finial (*stūpī*) of the pinnacle which represents formless *ākāśa*.

In Sanskrit poetics, *vyomabandha* is the name of a particular metrical arrangement of a verse (Sark II.121).

As *ākāśa* is formless, it does not normally lend itself to iconographic representation. There are, however, some sculptural representations of deities connected with or having the 'form' of *ākāśa*. These are discussed by T.A.G. Rao (in his *Elements of Hindu Iconography*).

In the Tantras, the circle is a symbol of *ākāśa*. This and other geometrical figures have provided the basis for a language of form in Sanskrit treaties dealing with Indian architecture and sculpture. For example, in the introduction to the edition and English translation of the **Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad** which deals with the science of composition, we read "The essential concern of this text is to demonstrate that the use and language of form, far from being invented for the simple delight of the senses and for extolling the beauties of the world, has far deeper significance. It is considered an autonomous, direct reflection of cosmic

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laws and expression of religious and metaphysical conceptions" (Alice Boner, Introd. p.4). The text bases its theory of art and its production on the Vedic conception of creation as arising from *brahman*, and regards the knowledge of line and circle as the essence of a visual work of art. The text says: *vṛttajñānaṃ rekhājñānaṃ ca yo jānāti sa sthāpakaḥ*, "He who has the knowledge of circle and line is a sthāpaka" (VSUp I.4, tr. A. Boner and B. Bäumer). The compositional diagram (*khilapañjara*) for images starts with a circle (*ādau vṛttam*, VSUp II.6) drawn around the centre (which symbolizes *brahman*). "The CIRCLE and the LINE, with their developments into second and third dimensions, such as plane, cube and sphere, actually embrace the whole display of visible forms in the universe" (Alice Boner, Introd. p.26).

Process

"Everything that has form, everything that is the result of combination, is evolved out of this Ākāśa. It is the Ākāśa that becomes the air, that becomes the liquids, that becomes the solids; it is the Ākāśa that becomes the sun, the earth, the moon, the stars, the comets; it is the Ākāśa that becomes the human body, the animal body, the plants, every form that we see, everything that can be sensed, everything that exists" (Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, Vol.I, p.147).

The word *kha* originally meant the round, central hole of a wheel where the spokes meet. It was, therefore, a concept of centrality. As we have noted above, the geometric form which generally symbolizes *ākāśa* in the Tantras is the circle. As the first principle of creation, space is the centre of the wheel of creation and dissolution. The Creation emerges from space by the centrifugal motion of *prāṇa*, the vital breath, and it is again dissolved into space by its centripetal motion.

The **Chāndogya Upaniṣad** (VI.2) records a tradition, which is probably quite old, that speaks of the creation of the three subtle elements of fire, water and earth, which were supposed to compose the world. The Upaniṣad (VI.3) then speaks of the process of *trivṛtkaraṇa*, a process through which these three elements are compounded with one another, as a result of which the three visible gross elements arise. The **Brahma-Sūtra** (II.3) records a view, which it does not accept, that *ākāśa* is eternal, having no genesis. The **Taittirīya Upaniṣad** (II.1) does not support this view but maintains that *ākāśa* was the first element to appear from the Supreme Self, and from *ākāśa* appeared air. In this way, the other three elements – fire, water and earth – appeared one after another in the said order. The **Brahma-Sūtra** (II.3) reconciles these

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two traditions as found in the **Chāndogya** and in the **Taittirīya Upaniṣad** and concludes that space is the first created principle. *Ākāśa* makes room for further creation. Whatever is generated is generated in space. *Ākāśa* makes name and form manifest. The Vedāntins hold that the five elements emerge from the Supreme as subtle elements. These are then compounded with one another in a process called *pañcīkaraṇa* – 'quintuplication' that makes one of them predominant in term in such a way as to give rise to the gross elements. Thus, in its gross form, only half of *ākāśa* is pure space, while the other half consists of the remaining four elements, each in equal proportion.

In the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system, *ākāśa* is eternal. It generates sound and is not compounded with other elements, although it pervades everything. According to the Sāṃkhya-Yoga system, the five *tanmātras* or subtle principles, sound and the rest, are produced from the ego (*ahaṃkāra*). The five gross elements come into existence from these five subtle principles. Thus, the element *ākāśa* evolves from the subtle element of sound (*śabda tanmātra*).

The Āgamas and the Tantras largely subscribe to the Sāṃkhya view of the origin of the gross elements from the subtle and the latter from the ego. But they further maintain that the supreme principle is deity. In the monistic Śaiva Tantras the male deity initially assumes the aspect of his universal energy, which is the female deity, and then goes on to manifest as the universe. This takes place through a process of graded emanation of principles, largely following the Sāṃkhya scheme when it reaches the sphere where duality prevails. The entire process is understood as a graded series of limitations that infinite consciousness, which is deity, imposes upon itself: *atyantasaṃkocagrahaṇād acidrūpatām avabhāsya ākāśādīni pañca bhūtāni*, "(The Lord) assuming extreme limitation in the form of matter manifests the five gross elements beginning with *ākāśa* and the rest" (Rājānaka's Comm. on Ṣaṭtriṃśattattvasandoha, 18, tr. D.B. Sen Sharma). In other works like the Epics and the Purāṇas one or another of the above-mentioned views is found as the process of creation.

Conclusion

This treatment of the concept of *ākāśa/kha/vyoman* has sought to highlight how it has played a very significant role in ancient Indian thought. It has moved from the elemental to the higher levels of thought and consciousness. As the first and the subtlest of the elements constituting the universe, *ākāśa* is closest to the Supreme Self. Hence it has served as a symbol for the *ātman* and adopted as such in different systems of *sādhanā* or meditation, so that one may ultimately reach *cidākāśa*, the space of the highest level of consciousness, where one will

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find the individual soul merged in the Supreme Self and discover the complete identity of inner and outer space.

Void, *ākāśa*, makes it possible for all the forms of art to appear. It is the prerequisite of all creative activities, and the manifestation of name and form. The concept of the space hidden in the cavity of heart as the seat of the Supreme Self has been represented as the cave and the cave temple. In various ways, the concept of *ākāśa* is connected with temple architecture and the compositional diagram of sacred images. All musical notes originate and are perceived in *ākāśa*, the sole source of sound. The highest aim of the arts is, however, not only to impart delight, but to raise one from *bhūtākāśa*, the gross element of space to *cidākāśa*, the space of consciousness and the seat of bliss.

Samiran Chandra Chakrabarti

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VĀYU

Overview

Vāyu or *vāta* (m.) literally means 'wind' or 'air'. It is both the outer air and the inner wind of the body, namely, the breath, breathing and the vital air. It is the second of the five elements in the course of evolution, said to be the fastest-moving element, it has evolved out of →*ākāśa* or space. As a deity, *Vāyu* reigns in mid-space or atmosphere (*antarikṣa*). The elemental forces of the storm, the subtle breeze and the even subtler breath (→*prāṇa*, Vol. I), all these are forms of *vāyu*. *Vāyu* and *prāṇa* are related as the macro– and microcosmic aspects of the same reality. They represent the life-breath of the cosmos and of the living body. Accordingly, the cosmic wind is said to have evolved from the vital breath (*prāṇa*) of the Supreme Being (→*puruṣa*, Vol. I). *Vāyu* as the god of the wind is one of the Vasus, a king of the Gandharvas, the fourth watch of the day (*muhūrta*), the north-west quarter and the letter 'Y'.

Vāyu is associated with two *tanmātras*, namely, *śabda* (sound) and *sparśa* (touch). It is invisible but it can be perceived by the ear and touch. Thus it is said that: "By a transformation of space came forth wind, possessing the qualities of sound and tangibility" (*ākāśavikṛtervāyuḥ śabdasparśaguṇo'bhavat*, MatPur III.24). *Vāyu* is ever active, and indeed, it is also thought to be the very principle of movement and activity.

In Āyurveda, *vāta* denotes one of the three humours of the body. The other two are *kapha* – 'phlegm' and *pitta* – 'bile'.

In the Arts, *vāyu* plays a role in the production of sound in music. As a symbol of dynamism it is the principle of movement in dance and in sculpture. Here, too, it is inseparable from its counterpart, *prāṇa*, the vital breath.

Etymology and Related Words

The noun *vāyu* (m.) is derived from the root *vā-*, 'to blow' with the suffix *uṇ* (cf. *'kṛvāpāji'* ..., Uṇādi I.1) and a final increment '*y*' (supported by the rule '*āto yuk...*' Pā VII.3.33). The noun *vāta* is also derived from the same root *vā-*, 'to blow' (cf. *vāto vātīti sataḥ*, Nir X.34).

We find this etymological concept at a very early stage of Vedic literature: *vāta ā vātu bheṣajam* (ṚV I.186.1), *vāto anuvāti* (ṚV I.148.4), *vāto vi*

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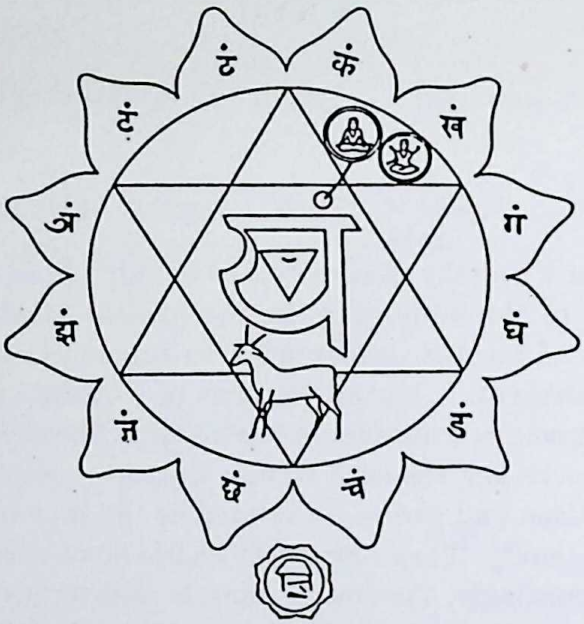

Figure 13: *Anāhata cakra: ya-bīja* for wind

vātyagramit (ṚV I.28.6), *vāto vāntu diśodiśaḥ* (AV IV.16.8), *vātasya pravām upavām anuvāti arciś* (AV XII.1.51) etc. The juxtaposition of noun and verb indicates that both are traced to a common verbal root.

The authors of the Brāhmaṇas also knew about the root *vā-*. In the **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** we find the same etymological explanation of the term *vāyu* as follows: *tad vāyurupavāti* (ŚBr XIII.3.8.6).

Following the Vedic and Brāhmaṇical traditions of etymology (i.e. the method of deriving a word from its root), the ancient etymologist Yāska has given three etymologies of the term *vāyu* in his **Nirukta.**

According to Yāska, *vāyu*, the name of the foremost among the deities of the middle region, is derived as follows:

> वायुर्वातेः । वेतेर्वा स्याद्गतिकर्मणः । एतेरिति स्थौलाष्ठीविः । अनर्थको वकारः ।
>
> Nir X.1
>
> '*Vāyu* (wind) is derived from (the verb) *vā* (to blow) or it may be derived from the verb *vī* (meaning to move). It is derived from the verb *i* (to go)', says Sthaulāṣṭhīvi, 'the letter *v* being meaningless'. (Tr. L. Sarup)

In grammatical terms the above can be explained as follows:

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(i) *vā-*, 'to blow'+*uṇ* (Uṇādi I.1) > *vāyu* (here the glide '*y*' is supported by the rule *āto yuk ciṇkṛtoḥ* -Pā VII.3.33).

(ii) *vī-* 'to move'+*uṇ* > *vāyu* formed by augmentation (*vṛddhi*) of the final vowel.

(iii) *i-* 'to go'+*uṇ* > *āyu* > *vāyu* which is formed by prefixing the glide '*v*'.

From the above etymologies we can extract the three-dimensional meaning of the concept:

The first etymology can be related to the gross, physical aspect of *vāyu*, the second to the subtle state, namely, the heavenly form and the third to the subtlest form of wind which is identified with life (*āyu*) and the vital breath (*prāṇa*).

Kṣīrasvāmin (a commentator of Amara Kośa) has accepted the first of these three etymologies of Yāska which he states as follows:

वाति वायुः, कृवापाजीत्युण् ।

AmKo I.1.61

The word is derived from the root *vā-* (to go) with the suffix *uṇ* according to the *uṇādi sūtra* '*kṛvāpāji*'... etc. (Tr. R. S. Bhattacharya)

In the **Nirukta** we also find the etymologies of some synonyms of *vāyu* such as *marut, mātariśvan* and the like. According to Yāska, the term *Marut*, the first among the group of atmospheric deities, is derived as follows:

मरुतो मितराविणो वा । मितरोचिनो वा । महद् द्रवन्तीति वा ।

Nir XI.13

Marutaḥ, of measured sound (*mi-+ru-*), or of measured brilliancy (*mi-+ruc-*), or they run very much (*mahad+dru*). (Tr. L Sarup)

According to Yāska, *mātariśvan*, a synonym of *vāyu*, is derived as follows:

मातरिश्वा वायुः । मातर्यन्तरिक्षे श्वसिति । मातर्याश्वनितीति वा ।

Nir VII.26

Mātariśvan is air: it breathes in the atmosphere, or moves quickly in the atmosphere (*mātari+āśu+an-*). (Tr. L. Sarup)

The same fanciful, popular etymological derivation of the word is found in the **Ṛgveda** (III.29.11).

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Twenty synonyms of *vāyu* are mentioned in the **Amara Kośa** (I.61.63). They are the following: *śvasana, sparśana, vāyu, mātariśvan, sadāgati, pṛṣadaśva, gandhavaha, gandhavāha, anila, āśuga, samīra, māruta, marut, jagatprāṇa, samīraṇa, nabhasvān, vāta, pavana, pavamāna,* and *prabhañjana.*

Sixty synonyms of *vāyu* are mentioned in the **Vaijayantī Kośa** (I.2.47–54).

Some of the important compounds formed with *vāyu/vāta* are the following: *vāyukeśa* (ṚV III.38.6), having waving hair (said of the Gandharvas); *vāyukoṇa*, the north-west quarter; *vāyugopa* (ṚV X.151.4), having the wind as protector; *vāyughna*, 'wind-destroying', curing windy disorders; *vāyucakra*, name of one of the seven *ṛṣis* (said to be the father of the Maruts); *vāyuciti*, *vāyu*'s pile or layer; *vāyutejas* (AV X.5.26), having the sharpness of wind; *vāyudeva*, the lunar mansion Svātī (presided over by Vāyu); *vāyudaivata*, having *vāyu* as a deity; *vāyudhātu*, the element air or wind; *vāyupañcaka*, the set of five vital airs; *vāyubīja*, seed or germ of the air (according to some, this is the syllable *yaṃ*); *vāyubhūta*, one who has become like the wind; *vāyumaṇḍala*, the atmosphere; *vāyumārga*, the path of the wind; *vāyuloka*, the world of *vāyu*, and so on.

Layers of Meaning

Air, wind and breath are the same reality of *vāyu* pervading the cosmos and the human body. The macro- and microcosmic manifestations of *vāyu* are differentiated as gross, subtle and subtlest, and in the Vedic terminology which permeates almost all the later conceptions, *vāta* is the gross element, *vāyu* is its subtle aspect, and *prāṇa* is the subtlest, the life-principle in the living body, the vital air or breath. These three also represent the *ādhibhautika* (*vāta*), *ādhidaivika* (*vāyu*) and *ādhyātmika* (*prāṇa*) levels. The divinity is mostly called *Vāyu*, one of its older names is Mātariśvan. The *Maruts* are a cosmic manifestation of storm, always in plural form.

The **Śiva Purāṇa** contains a passage which summarizes the various aspects of *vāyu*:

शिष्यः स्वयंभुवो देवः सर्वप्रत्यक्षदृग्वशी ।
आज्ञायां मरुतो यस्य संस्थिताः सप्तसप्तकाः ॥
प्रेरयञ्छश्वदंगानि प्राणाद्याभिः स्ववृत्तिभिः ।
सर्वभूतशरीराणां कुरुते यश्च धारणम् ॥
अणिमादिभिरष्टाभिरैश्वर्यैश्च समन्वितः ।
तिर्यङ्नरादिभिर्मेध्यैर्भुवनानि विभर्ति यः ॥
आकाशयोनिर्द्विगुणः स्पर्शशब्दसमन्वयात् ।
तेजसां प्रकृतिश्चेति यमाहुस्तत्त्वचिन्तकाः ॥

ŚPur VII.1.4.4–7

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Vāyu the disciple of Brahmā, the self-controlled lord who perceives everything directly; in whose bidding stay the fortynine Maruts always; who sustains the bodies of all living beings urging them perpetually by his own functionaries *Prāṇa* and others; who is endowed with the eightfold glories; who supports the worlds with his holy hands; who is born of *Ākāśa*; who possesses the two qualities of touch and sound and whom the philosophers call the material cause of the fiery principle. (Tr. J.L. Shastri)

The important meanings of *vāyu* are wind; air, i.e cosmic air; the god of the wind; storm (*marut*); the north-west quarter; breathing; breath, the wind of the body; a vital air; (in medicine) the windy humour in the body or any morbid affection of it. *Vāyu* is the god who reigns over the mid-space (*antarikṣa*), who is life-energy and spiritual power. Thus the three dimensions, of reality, *ādhibhautika*, the cosmic and elemental, *ādhidaivika*, the divine, and *ādhyātmika*, the microcosmic or spiritual, complement each other.

Development of the Concept

Vāyu in all its aspects figures in the **Ṛgveda** as a powerful, yet invisible and hence subtle, elemental force. In the Nāsadīya-Sūkta the *ṛṣi* asks about the origin of the universe from the pre-cosmic void:

नासदासीन्नो सदासीत् तदानीं नासीद्रजो नो व्योमा परो यत् ।
किमावरीवः कुह् कस्य शर्मन्नम्भः किमासीद्गहनं गभीरम् ॥
न मृत्युरासीदमृतं न तर्हि न रात्र्या अह्न आसीत् प्रकेतः ।
आनीदवातं स्वधया तदेकं तस्माद्धान्यन्न परः किं चनास ॥

ṚV X.129.1–2

1. At first was neither Being nor Nonbeing.
There was not air nor yet sky beyond.
What was its wrapping? Where? In whose protection?
Was Water there, unfathomable and deep?
2. There was no death then, nor yet deathlessness;
of night or day there was not any sign.
The One breathed without breath, by its own impulse.
Other than that was nothing else at all. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

The expression *āvarīvaḥ*, translated as 'wrapping' in verse 1 has been variously interpreted (cf. K.F. Geldner, Vol. III, p. 359–360), but it seems to refer

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to the movement of *vāyu* or *prāṇa*, the vital breath. The question posed in verse 1 is given a mysterious answer in verse 2: *ānīdavātaṃ svadhayā tadekaṃ* – 'the one breathed by its own impulse'. The One does not require any external air to breathe, it does it out of its own power or inner impulse (*svadhā*). There is no duality at this stage, and yet there is life; and life means breath, wind, movement. It is the inner dynamism of the One which then manifests as wind or breath. This impulse or innate power (*svadhā*) has sometimes been related to the *śakti* of Śaiva philosophy which is also independent of any external power and represents the inner dynamism of the Absolute.

The cosmogony of the Puruṣa-Sūkta (ṚV X.90) is more anthropomorphic:

चन्द्रमा मनसो जातश्चक्षोः सूर्यो अजायत ।
मुखादिन्द्रश्चाग्निश्च प्राणाद्वायुरजायत ॥

ṚV X.90.13

The Moon was born from his mind; the Sun
came into being from his eye;
from his mouth came Indra and Agni,
while from his breath Wind was born. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

In both cosmogonies it is the inner breath of the Great Being which gives rise to the cosmic Wind. In a different version of the Puruṣa-Sūkta in the **Yajur-Veda**, both *vāyu* and *prāṇa* were born from the ear of *Puruṣa* (YV XXXI.12: *śrotrādvāyuśca prāṇaśca*). At a later period, when the elements are conceived to be related to the sense organs, the ear is related to *ākāśa*, space. The Ṛgvedic conception has pervaded the whole of Indian speculation on the micro-macrocosmic relations (→ *puruṣa*, Vol. I). One reason for the relation of *vāyu-prāṇa* with *śrotra* is the association of wind with sound (and of *prāṇa* with subtle internal sound).

We find a lively description of the elemental wind, where *vāyu* is called 'the soul or life of the gods', the life-germ of the world, and his freedom of movement is praised:

वातस्य नु महिमानं रथस्य रुजन्नेति स्तनयन्नस्य घोषः ।
दिविस्पृग्यात्यरुणानि कृण्वन्नुतो एति पृथिव्या रेणुमस्यन् ।
सं प्रेरते अनु वातस्य विष्ठा ऐनं गच्छन्ति समनं न योषाः ।
ताभिः सयुक् सरथं देव ईयतेऽस्य विश्वस्य भुवनस्य राजा ॥
अन्तरिक्षे पथिभिरीयमानो न नि विशते कतमच्चनाहः ।
अपां सखा प्रथमजा ऋतावा क्व स्विज्जातः कुत आ बभूव ॥
आत्मा देवानां भुवनस्य गर्भो यथावशं चरति देव एषः ।
घोषा इदस्य शृण्विरे न रूपं तस्मै वाताय हविषा विधेम ॥

ṚV X.168.1–4

Oh, the wind's chariot, its power and its glory!

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It passes by crashing.
Out streak the lightnings, dust rises on earth.
The Wind passes.
The hosts of the Wind speed onward after him,
like women assembling.
This king of the world lifts them up in his chariot
through lofty regions.
He speeds on air's pathways, he rests not nor slumbers
for even a day.
First-born, the waters' friend, the righteous, whence came he?
How was he born?
Breath of the Gods and life germ of the universe,
freely he wanders.
We bring him our homage, whose voice may be heard,
but whose form is not seen. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

The cosmic wind-element, *vāyu/vāta*, reigns in the atmosphere:

सूर्यो नो दिवस्पातु वातो अन्तरिक्षात् ।
अग्निर्नः पार्थिवेभ्यः ॥

ṚV X.158.1

May Sūrya guard us out of heaven, and Vāta from the firmament,
And Agni from terrestrial spots. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

As an element, *vāyu* is associated with other elements, particularly with *agni*, whose flames are moved by the wind (cf. ṚV X.78.3; I.148.4) and with water in its various forms. In the thunderstorm the different elements combine:

प्र वाता वान्ति पतयन्ति विद्युत उदोषधीर्जिहते पिन्वते स्वः ।
इरा विश्वस्मै भुवनाय जायते यत् पर्जन्यः पृथिवीं रेतसावति ॥

ṚV V. 83.4

The winds burst forth, the lightnings flash,
the plants shoot up, the heavens stream,
the sap surges up in every stem,
when Parjanya quickens the earth with his seed. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

In a truly ecological prayer, the poet prays that the winds may waft sweetness, the rivers may flow carrying sweet waters and the herbs growing on the earth may be sweet for us humans (cf. ṚV I.90.6: *madhu vātā ṛtāyate...*).

Although the dangers of the violent storms which shake everything (ṚV X.78.3), break and uproot trees, are very much present in the mind of the

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Vedic poets, they view the element wind primarily as life-giving and full of healing power.

वात आ वातु भेषजं शंभु मयोभु नो हृदे । प्र ण आयूँषि तारिषत् ॥
उत वात पितासि न उत भ्रातोत नः सखा । स नो जीवातवे कृधि ॥
यददो वात ते गृहेऽमृतस्य निधिर्हितः । ततो नो देहि जीवसे ॥

ṚV X.186.1–3

May the Wind breathe healing upon us,
prolong our life-span,
and fill our hearts with comfort!
You are our father, O wind,
our friend and our brother,
Give us life that we may live.
From that immortal treasure, O Lord,
which is hidden in your abode,
impart to us that we may live. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

Vāyu with his healing breezes is even called "the medicine of this whole world, the messenger of the gods" (*tvaṃ hi viśva bheṣajo devānāṃ dūta īyase*, ṚV X.137.3), who blows away all disease and evil.

Wind and life are so closely related that *vāta* is invoked for good child-birth:

यथा वातः पुष्करिणीं समिङ्गयति सर्वतः ।
एवा ते गर्भ एजतु निरैतु दशमास्यः ॥
यथा वातो यथा वनं यथा समुद्र एजति ।
एवा त्वं दशमास्य सहावेहि जरायुणा ॥

ṚV V.78.7–8

Like as the wind on every side ruffles a pool of lotuses,
So stir in thee the babe unborn, so may the ten-month babe descend
Like as the wind, like as the wood, like as the sea is set astir,
So also, ten-month babe, descend together with the after-birth.
(Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

Wind is the cosmic physician:

तन्नो वातो मयोभु वातु भेषजं तन्माता पृथिवी तत् पिता द्यौः ।
तद् ग्रावाणः सोमसुतो मयोभुवस्तदश्विना शृणुतं धिष्ण्या युवम् ॥

ṚV I.89.4

May the wind waft to us that pleasant medicine,
May Earth our Mother give it, and our Father Heaven.

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And the joy-giving stones that press the Soma's juice.
Aśvins, may ye, for whom our spirits long, hear this. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

Vāyu's chief characteristics are his fast movement in all directions and his subtle or, at times, thundering voice (cf. ṚV I.113.18). Therefore *vāyu* and the *maruts* (the winds of the storm) are often said to move in the air on swift-moving cars (*ratha*, cf. ṚV IV.48.1; I.88.1), drawn by horses (cf. ṚV V.134.3).

As we have already mentioned, in his *ādhidaivika* aspect, *vāyu/vāta* is the god of the atmosphere, which is the mid-space between heaven and earth. In his form as the god Mātariśvan, he is born from →*agni*:

तनूनपाद्उच्यते गर्भ आसुरो नराशंसो भवति यद् विजायते ।
मातरिश्वा यदमिमीत मातरि वातस्य सर्गो अभवत् सरीमणि ॥

ṚV III.29.11

As Germ celestial he (Agni) is called Tanūnapāt, and Nārāśaṃsa born diffused in varied shape.
Formed in his Mother he is Mātariśvan; he hath, in his course, become the rapid flight of wind. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

The divine aspect of the wind is also clearly expressed in the Devī-Sūkta, where *vāc*, the goddess Word, extols herself in the highest terms:

अहमेव वात इव प्र वाम्यारभमाणा भुवनानि विश्वा ।
परो दिवा पर एना पृथिव्यैतावती महिना सं बभूव ॥

ṚV X.125.8

I breathe out strongly like the wind while clasping
unto myself all worlds, all things that are.
I tower above the earth, above the heavens,
so mighty am I in my power and splendor! (Tr. R. Panikkar)

This passage expresses the relationship between *vāc* and *vāyu*, at both the macro- and microcosmic level. The sound of wind is the primordial sound of nature, and the all-embracing nature of *vāyu* expands to a universal, divine quality.

An extraordinary hymn which describes the long-haired ascetic (*keśin*) and inspired *muni* (ṚV X.136) extols *vāyu/vāta* as the inspiring spirit of ecstatic sages (*munis*). It represents the swiftness of their spiritual intuition as well as their great inner and outer freedom:

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मुनयो वातरशनाः पिशङ्गा वसते मला ।
वातस्यानु ध्राजिं यन्ति यद्देवासो अविक्षत ॥

ṚV X.136.2

Girded with the wind, they have donned ocher mud for a garment.
So soon as the Gods
have entered within them, they follow the wings of the wind, these silent ascetics. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

The **Atharva-Veda** is the most ecological of the Vedic Saṃhitās (what used to be called 'magical' in earlier interpretations). Accordingly, the interrelationship between macro- and microcosm is central in its understanding of the nature of *vāyu*. The so-called magical incantations or prayers contained in it are based on the connection between the cosmic wind, the divine power, and the life-breath (*prāṇa*).

प्राणमाहुर्मातरिश्वानं वातो ह प्राण उच्यते ।
प्राणे ह भूतं भव्यं च प्राणे सर्वं प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥

AV XI.4.15

The mighty Wind they call him, or Breeze
The future and the past
exist in him.
On Breath of life all things are based. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

In a process which seems to reverse the cosmogony of the Puruṣa-Sūkta, the gods enter the body of Man as he is created:

सूर्यचक्षुर्वातः प्राणं पुरुषस्य वि भेजिरे ।
अथास्येतरमात्मानं देवाः प्रायच्छन्नग्नये ॥

AV XI.8.31

The sun and wind formed, separate, the eye and vital breath of man.
His other person have the gods bestowed on Agni as a gift.
(Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

The same consciousness pervades a prayer for well-being:

सूर्यो मे चक्षुर्वातः प्राणोऽन्तरिक्षमात्मा पृथिवी शरीरम् ।
अस्तृतो नामाहमयमस्मि स आत्मानं नि दधे
द्यावापृथिवीभ्यां गोपीथाय ॥

AV V.9.7

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Mine eye is Sūrya and my breath is Vāta. Air is my soul and pṛthivī my body.
I verily who never have been conquered give up my life to Heaven and Earth for keeping. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

These elements and their deities present in the human body are responsible for its harmony and strength.

As life-giving principles, Sun and Wind are closely related:

स वै वायोरजायत तस्माद्वायुरजायत ॥

AV XIII.4.32

He (the Sun) was produced from wind and wind derives his origin from him. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

The desire for ecological harmony more than an egoistic wish for happiness inspires many prayers of the **Atharva-Veda**:

शं नो वातो वातु शं नस्तपतु सूर्यः ।
अहानि शं भवन्तु नः शं रात्री प्रति धीयतां शमुषा नो व्युच्छतु ॥

AV VII.69.1

May the wind blow us joy,
may the sun shine down joy on us,
may our days pass with joy
may the night be a gift
of joyful peace!
May the dawn bring us joy at its coming! (Tr. R. Panikkar)

A medicinal tree (*Lākṣā*) is addressed, saying that 'its soul is wind' (*vāto hātmā babhūva te,* AV V.5.7). And a shell bearing the precious pearl is called 'child of the wind' (AV IV.10.1).

The life-giving and healing power of *vāyu* is seen especially in its relation with *prāṇa*:

प्राणेनाग्निं सं सृजति वातः प्राणेन संहितः ।
प्राणेन विश्वतोमुखं सूर्यं देवा अजनयन् ॥

AV XIX.27.7

Fire they endow with vital breath, wind is compact with vital breath:
With vital breath the gods produced the sun whose face turns every way. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

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Indeed, the secret of wholeness, of healing and well-being lies in the harmonious relationship between the macrocosmic and microcosmic forces. If this unity and harmony is lost, all kinds of imbalanced conditions arise, in the cosmos as well as in the human being. Therefore the simplest possible prayer for life is: "May the wind protect you with life-breath" (*vātaḥ prāṇena rakṣatu*, AV XIX.27.2). The vital airs have to be united (*sam+dhā-*, cf. *samādhi*) by the cosmic powers in order to hold life together.

अग्निः प्राणान्त्सं दधाति चन्द्रः प्राणेन संहितः ।
व्यहं सर्वेण पाप्मना वि यक्ष्मेण समायुषा ॥

AV III.31.6

Agni combines the vital airs. The moon is closely joined with breath.
I free from every evil, from decline: I compass round with life.
(Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

And similarly:

यत्र ब्रह्मविदो यान्ति दीक्षया तपसा सह ।
वायुर्मा तत्र नयतु वायुः प्राणान्दधातु मे ।
वायवे स्वाहा ॥

AV XIX.43.2

Where the knowers of Brahman go,
with initiation and fervour,
thither let *vāyu* lead me.
May *vāyu* keep my life-breaths.
Hail to *vāyu*!

In the prayers for restoring life to a dying man, all the cosmic and divine powers are invoked, the foremost being *vāyu* because it can revive the life-breath:

तुभ्यं वातः पवतां मातरिश्वा तुभ्यं वर्षन्त्वमृतान्यापः ।
सूर्यस्ते तन्वे शं तपाति त्वां मृत्युर्दयतां मा प्र मेष्ठाः ॥
जीवेभ्यस्त्वा समुद्रे वायुरिन्द्रो धाता दधातु सविता त्रायमाणः ।

AV VIII.1.5, 15ab

5. May the great Wind breathe purification upon you,
May the Waters rain immortality upon you, may the Sun warm your body with blessing, may Death
show you mercy! Do not perish!

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15. May the Lord of the Wind, the Sky, the Creator,
the saving Sun, restore you to communion with the living!
(Tr. R. Panikkar)

Since at death the breath of a man goes back to the wind, the prayer for healing invokes the reverse process to bring life back:

वातात्ते प्राणमविदं सूर्याच्चक्षुरहं तव ।
यत्ते मनस्त्वयि तद्धारयामि सं वित्स्वाङ्गैर्वद जिह्रयालपन् ॥
AV VIII.2.3

From the Wind I have taken your breath,
from the Sun your eyesight.
I strengthen your heart in you, consolidate your limbs.
(Tr. R. Panikkar)

The movement of the wind has also inspired the poetic imagination. Thus the rain following thunderstorm is said to be 'born from wind and from the cloud' (AV I.12.1). In a charm to win a young maiden's love the poet prays that her mind may follow him 'as smoke accompanies the wind' (AV VI.89.2). Or the Gandharvas should be chased away 'as wind chases cloud' (AV VIII.6.19). The enemies should be overthrown just 'as a storm overthrows trees' (AV X.1.17).

In the **Yajur-Veda** *vāyu* is described as 'the quickest deity' (*vāyurvai kṣepiṣṭhā devatā*, TSam II.1.1). In the context of the sacrifice it is said:

उरो अन्तरिक्ष सजूर्देवेन वातेनास्य हविषस्त्मना यज ... ।
TSam I.3.8.1

O broad atmosphere in unison with the god wind!
Sacrifice with the life of this offering. (Tr. A.B. Keith)

At the anointing of the victim for the animal sacrifice the priest utters:

सं ते प्राणो वायुना गच्छताम् ... ।
TSam I.3.8.1

Let thy breath be united with the wind... (Tr. A.B. Keith)

The first *mantra* of the Black **Yajur-Veda** is an invocation of the winds for strength. It occurs in the context of the new and full moon sacrifices:

इषे त्वोर्जे त्वा वायवः स्थोपायवः स्थ ... ।
TSam I.1.1

For food thee, for strength thee!
Ye are winds, ye are approachers. (Tr. A.B. Keith)

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In the sacrificial context of the *agnicayana* the five winds moving in the five quarters are invoked (they are the four cardinal directions and the zenith):

पञ्चानां त्वा वातानां यन्त्राय धर्त्राय गृह्णामि ...।

TSam I.6.1.2

For a prop, a support, of five winds, I take thee. (Tr. A.B. Keith)

Vāyu himself is conceived as the victim, and the result of this sacrifice is that one wins the world of *vāyu*:

वायुः पशुरासीत्तेनायजन्त स एतँल्लोकमजयद्यस्मिन्वायुः स ते लोको भविष्यति तं जेष्यसि पिबैता अपः ।

YV XXIII.17

Vāyu was the victim. With him they sacrificed. He won this world in which Vāyu is. This shall become thy world. This shalt thou win. Drink these waters. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

Vāyu is described as being sharp, like the wooden sword used as a sacrificial implement (cf. YV I.24).

The sacrificial, the cosmic, divine and human dimensions of *vāyu* are explicit in the **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa**. His nature is described in different contexts. He is invisible and can only be heard and inferred from his shaking movement:

रूपमेव वायोरादत्त । तस्मादेतस्य लेलयत इवैवोपशृण्वन्ति । न त्वेनं पश्यन्ति । आत्तं ह्यस्य रूपम् ।

ŚBr XI.8.3.8

He (the sun) took to himself Vāyu's form; whence people hear it (the wind), as it were, shaking but do not see it, for its form has been taken from it. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

Because of his formlessness he is 'inexpressible' (*anirukta*, ŚBr VIII.7.3.12). His swiftness is one of his chief characteristics:

अथो वायुर्वा आशुस्त्रिवृत् । स एषु त्रिषु लोकेषु वर्तते । तद् यत्तमाह - आशुरिति - एष हि सर्वेषां भूतानामाशिष्ठः ।

ŚBr VIII.4.1.9

But the swift threefold one, doubtless, is vāyu: he exists in these three worlds. And as to why he calls him 'the swift one' it is because he is the swiftest of all beings. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

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Figure 14: Flying Figures: Gandharva and Apsaras on Kailāsanātha Temple, Ellora, 8th Cent., A.D.

Moreover, wind or air is all-pervading. Personified as a man, *Vāyu* is said to be the partner of the female waters, like Gandharva is that of Apsaras:

> "विश्वव्यचाः" (YV XVIII.41) इति । एष हीदं सर्वं व्यचः करोति । "वातो गन्धर्वस्तस्यापो अप्सरसः"– इति । वातो ह गन्धर्वोऽङ्गिरप्सरोभिर्मिथुनेन सहोच्चक्राम ।
>
> ŚBr IX.4.1.10
>
> 'All expansive' (YV XVIII.41) for the wind (air), indeed, makes up all this expanse; 'vāta (the wind) is the Gandharva: his Apsaras are the waters'. – For as a Gandharva the wind, indeed, went forth with the waters as the Apsaras, his mates. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

Because of his all-pervasive and life-giving nature *Vāyu* is called the support of all beings:

> प्रतिष्ठा वै धर्त्रम् । वायुरु सर्वेषां भूतानां प्रतिष्ठा ।
>
> ŚBr VIII.4.1.26
>
> Stay means support; and the wind indeed is the support of all beings. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

The wind in its cosmic aspect makes things swell with abundance and he causes the rain to fall:

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अयं वै वायुर्योऽयं पवते । एष वा इदं सर्वं प्रप्याययति यदिदं किञ्च वर्षति । एष वा एतासां प्रप्याययिता । तस्मादाह – वायवः स्थ – इति ।

ŚBr I.7.1.3

Indeed, it is this wind that here blows (*pavate*), it is this (wind) that makes swell all the rain that falls here, it is this that makes those (cows) swell; and for this reason he says 'the winds are ye!' (Tr. J. Eggeling)

Vāyu is also called *viśvajyotis* (cosmic light), because he illumines the atmosphere (*antarikṣa*). One of the bricks used to build the altar of the *agnicayana* is also called *viśvajyotis*.

अथ विश्वज्योतिषमुपदधाति । वायुर्वै मध्यमा विश्वज्योतिः । वायुर्ह्येवान्तरिक्षलोके विश्वं ज्योतिः । वायुमेवैतदुपदधाति । तामनन्तर्हितां दिश्याभ्य उपदधाति । दिक्षु तद्वायुं दधाति । तस्मात्सर्वासु दिक्षु वायुः ॥

ŚBr VIII.3.2.1

He (the sacrificer) then lays down a viśvajyotis (all-light brick). Now the middle viśvajyotis is vāyu, for vāyu (the wind) is all the light in the air-world; it is vāyu he thus places therein. He places it so as not to be separated from the regional (bricks): he thus places vāyu in the regions, and hence there is wind in all the regions. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

The two uppermost bricks of the *agnicayana* altar are identified with *vāyu* and *dyaus*, wind and sky:

वायुर्वै विकर्णी । द्यौरुत्तमा स्वयमातृण्णा । वायुं च तद्दिवं चोपदधाति । उत्तमे उपदधाति । उत्तमे हि वायुश्च द्यौश्च संस्पृष्टे । संस्पृष्टे हि वायुश्च द्यौश्च । ... तदसावादित्य इमाँल्लोकान्त्सूत्रे समावयते । तद् यत्तत्सूत्रं वायुः सः । स यः स वायुः – एषा सा विकर्णी । तद् यदेतामुपदधाति – असावेव तदादित्य इमाँल्लोकान्त्सूत्रे समावयते ॥

ŚBr VIII.7.3.9–10

The *vikarṇī* (brick) is Vāyu (the wind), and the last naturally-perforated one is the sky: he thus sets up both the wind and the sky. He lays them down as the last (highest), for wind and sky are the highest; and close together, for wind and sky are close together.

Then yonder sun strings these worlds to himself on a thread. Now that thread is the same as the wind; and that wind is the same as this vikarṇī: thus when he lays down the latter, then yonder sun strings to himself these worlds on a thread. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

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The idea that the wind strings together the worlds expressed in this passage is a precursor of the same idea found in the Upaniṣads.

The *agnicayana* recreates the cosmos:

अथ वातहोमाञ्जुहोति । इमे वै लोका एषोऽग्निः, वायुर्वातहोमाः । एषु तल्लोकेषु वायुं दधाति । तस्मादयमेषु लोकेषु वायुः ॥

बाह्येनाग्निमाहरति । आप्तो वा अस्य स वायुः – य एषु लोकेषु । अथ य इमाँल्लोकान्परेण वायुः – तमस्मिन्नेतद्दधाति ॥

बहिर्वेदिः । इयं वै वेदिः । आप्तो वा अस्य स वायुः – योऽस्याम् । अथ य इमां परेण वायुः –तमस्मिन्नेतद्दधाति ॥

अञ्जलिना । न ह्येतस्येतीवाभिपत्तिरस्ति । स्वाहाकारेण । जुहोति हि । अधोऽधो धुरम् । असौ वा आदित्य एष रथः । अर्वाचीनं तदादित्याद्वायुं दधाति । तस्मादेषोऽर्वाचीनमेवातः पवते ॥

"समुद्रोऽसि नभस्वान्"– इति । असौ वै लोकः समुद्रो नभस्वान् । "आर्द्रदानुः"– इति । एष ह्यार्द्रं ददाति । तद् योऽमुष्मिँल्लोके वायुः – तमस्मिन्नेतद्दधाति । "शम्भूर्मयोभूरभि मा वाहि स्वाहा" – इति । शिवः स्योनोऽभि मा वाहीत्येतत् ॥

ŚBr IX.4.2.1–5

He then offers (three) oblations of air: – this fire-altar is these (three) worlds, and the oblations of air are wind: he thus places the wind into these worlds, and hence there is wind here in these worlds.

He takes (the air) from outside the Vedi; for that wind which is in these worlds is already contained in this (fire-altar), and he now puts into it that wind which is beyond these worlds.

From outside the Vedi (he takes it), – for the Vedi is this (earth), and the wind which is on this (earth) is already contained in the wind which is beyond this (earth).

By his two hollow hands (he takes it), for only in this way is the catching of that (wind brought about). With the Svāhā-call (he offers), for he offers just under the shafts (of the chariot), – this chariot is yonder sun: he thus places the wind on this side of the sun, and hence that one blows on this side thereof.

(He offers, with YV XVIII.45), 'Thou art the cloudy ocean' – the cloudy ocean, doubtless, is yonder world (of the sky), – 'the giver of moisture', – for that (wind) indeed gives moisture: he thus bestows

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on this (fire-altar) the wind which is in yonder world; – 'blow thou kindly and propitiously upon me, hail!' – that is, 'blow favourably and gently upon me!' (Tr. J. Eggeling)

In one of the Brāhmaṇic cosmogonies Prajāpati couples with *pṛthivī*, the earth, by means of *agni* (the deity established on the earth), and with *antarikṣa*, the sky, by means of *vāyu*, the god of the air. *Vāyu* is also conceived here as the organic life-principle:

सोऽकामयत प्रजापतिः – भूय एव स्यात्, प्रजायेतेति । सोऽग्निना पृथिवीं मिथुनं समभवत् । तत आण्डं समवर्तत । तदभ्यमृशत् – पुष्यत्विति । पुष्यतु – भूयोऽस्तु इत्येव तदब्रवीत् ॥

स यो गर्भोऽन्तरासीत् – स वायुरसृज्यत । अथ यदस्रु संक्षरितमासीत् – तानि वयांस्यभवन् । अथ यः कपाले रसो लिप्त आसीत्; ता मरीचयोऽभवन् । अथ यत्कपालमासीत् – तदन्तरिक्षमभवत् ॥

सोऽकामयत – भूय एव स्यात्प्रजायेतेति । स वायुनान्तरिक्षं मिथुनं समभवत् । तत आण्डं समवर्तत ।

ŚBr VI.1.2.1–3

That Prajāpati desired, 'May it multiply, may it be reproduced!' By means (or in the form) of Agni he entered into union with the Earth: thence an egg arose. He touched it: 'May it grow! May it grow and multiply!' he said.

And the embryo which was inside was created as Vāyu (the wind). And the tear which had formed itself became those birds. And the juice which was adhering to the shell became those sun-motes. And that which was the shell became the air.

He desired, 'May it multiply, may it reproduce itself!' By means of Vāyu he entered into union with the Air (*antarikṣa*) thence an egg arose. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

We have already seen that *vāyu* is the god of mid-space, whereas *agni* rules on the earth and the sun in heaven. They are also called "the hearts of the gods" (*devānāṃ hṛdayāni* ŚBr IX.1.1.23).

ब्रह्म वा इदमग्र आसीत् । तद्देवानसृजत । तद्देवान् सृष्टेषु लोकेषु व्यारोहयत् । अस्मिन्नेव लोकेऽग्निम्, वायुमन्तरिक्षे, दिव्येव सूर्यम् ॥

ŚBr XI.2.3.1

Verily, in the beginning, this (universe) was the Brahman (neuter).

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It created the gods; and, having created the gods, it made them ascend these worlds: Agni this (terrestrial) world, Vāyu the air, and Sūrya the sky. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

These deities of the three worlds (*triloka*) are of the nature of light (*etā hyeva devatā viśvaṃ jyotiḥ*, ŚBr VI.3.3.16, →*jyotis*), and they are characterized by three divine qualities:

अग्निर्वै भर्गः । वायुर्महः । आदित्यो यशः । येऽन्ये देवास्तत्सर्वम् ।

ŚBr XII.3.4.8

And light, indeed, is Agni, might Vāyu (the wind), glory Āditya (the Sun), and what other gods there are they are everything. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

The three words used have all the implication of glory: *bhargas* (cf. the Gāyatrī *mantra*), *mahas* and *yaśas*.

The cosmic wind is one (though often described in the plural, especially when personified as the Maruts, the gods of the storm), but when it enters the human body it becomes manifold as the various vital airs. Wind is here identified with the sacrifice:

अयं वै यज्ञः, योऽयं पवते । सोऽयमेक इवैव पवते । सोऽयं पुरुषेऽन्तः – प्रविष्टो दशधा विहितः । स एवं कृत्स्नैः प्राणैरग्नेर्योनेरधिजायते । सैषा दशाक्षरा विराट् । सैषा संपत् । स यज्ञः ॥

ŚBr XI.1.2.3

And, indeed, this sacrifice is the blowing (wind): he blows here, as it were, as a single one, but when he has entered into man, he is divided into ten parts; with the vital airs thus distributed, it (the sacrifice) is born from out of its womb, the fire: this is that Virāj of ten syllables, this is that perfection, the sacrifice. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

The transition from the cosmic (*adhibhūta*) to the human (*adhyātma*) is from *antarikṣa* through *vāyu* to *prāṇa*:

अन्तरिक्षमेव विश्वं ... वायुर्नरः ।

* * *

प्राण एव वायुः । स नरः । स मध्येनास्य भवति । मध्येन ह्यन्तरिक्षस्य वायुः ॥

ŚBr IX.3.1.3, 5

The air is the All (*viśva*), and Vāyu (the wind) is its man (ruler).

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Vāyu (the wind) is the breath, he is the man; he is in the middle thereof, for the wind is in the middle of the air. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

Vāyu has another important mediating function. He moves swiftly and so is the messenger of the gods.

ते वायुमब्रुवन् । अयं वै वायुर्योऽयं पवते । "वायो त्वमिदं विद्धि" – यदि हतो वा वृत्रो जीवति वा, त्वं वै न आशिष्ठोऽसि । यदि जीविष्यति – त्वमेव क्षिप्रं पुनरागमिष्यसीति ॥

ŚBr IV.1.3.3

They (the gods) said unto Vāyu – Vāyu, forsooth, is he that blows yonder – 'Find thou out, O Vāyu, if Vṛtra be slain or alive; for thou art the swiftest among us: if he lives, thou indeed wilt quickly return hither.' (Tr. J. Eggeling)

It is he who transmits to the gods what is in the minds of men:

मनो देवा मनुष्यस्याजानन्तीति । मनसा संकल्पयति – तत् प्राणमपिपद्यते, प्राणो वातम् – वातो देवेभ्य आचष्टे – यथा पुरुषस्य मनः ॥

ŚBr III.4.2.6

The gods know the mind of man. In his mind he proposes; it passes on to the breath, and the breath to the wind, and the wind tells the gods what the mind of man is. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

Since *vāyu* and *prāṇa* are only the macro- and microcosmic aspects of the same reality, *vāyu* is the very life of living beings:

वायुप्रणेत्रा वै पशवः । प्राणो वै वायुः । प्राणेन हि पशवश्चरन्ति ॥

ŚBr IV.4.1.15

For beasts have Vāyu for their leader; and Vāyu (wind) is breath, since it is by means of the breath that beasts move about. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

Vāyu is life not only as the movement of breath, but he has the power to transform seeds into life (*vāyurvai retasāṃ vikartā, prāṇo vai vāyuḥ*, ŚBr XIII.3.8.1).

Hence also the conception that, at death, the beings pass into wind.

पुराऽचिरादग्निं मथित्वा, यां दिशं वातो वायात्, तां दिशमाहवनीयमुद्धृत्य वायव्यामाहुतिं जुहुयाम् । स विद्यां समृद्धं मेऽग्निहोत्रं सर्वदेवत्यम् । वायुं ह्येव सर्वाणि भूतान्यपियन्ति । वायोः पुनर्विसृज्यन्ते ।

ŚBr XI.5.3.11

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Having, without delay, churned out fire, and taken out an offering-fire in whatever direction the wind might be blowing, I (Śauceya) would perform an offering to Vāyu (the wind): I would then know that my agnihotra would be successful, belonging as it would to all deities; for all beings, indeed, pass over into the wind, and from out of the wind they are again produced. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

Therefore, when Prajāpati had sacrificed himself, in order to restore his life the gods first put *vāyu* back into him (ŚBr VI.2.2.7). In this context, as also elsewhere, *vāyu*'s colour is described as white.

The Upaniṣads essentially attempt to establish correlations between principles and spheres of reality (cf. L. Renou). They base their speculations on the relationship between *vāyu* and *prāṇa* on the three well-known levels of interpretation, namely, →*adhibhūta, adhidaiva* and *adhyātma* (Vol. IV). The cosmic conceptions of the Saṃhitās and Brāhmaṇas are present also in the Upaniṣads, but they are assumed into a more subtle meditation on the nature of Reality. Wind, as the subtlest of the four gross elements, has served as a symbol and metaphor for the ascent to the indescribable, bodiless, all-pervading nature of →*brahman* and →*ātman* (Vol. I). Though all the elements function as steps in this ascent, wind has played a particularly important role in passing from the tangible to the intangible.

The immanence and transcendence of the *ātman* is vividly expressed in the **Kaṭha Upaniṣad:**

वायुर्यथैको भुवनं प्रविष्टो रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव ।
एकस्तथा सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा रूपं रूपं प्रतिरूपो बहिश्च ॥

KaṭhUp V.10

As the wind, which is one, on entering creation,
conforms its own form to the form of each being,
so also the One, the *ātman* within all beings,
assumes all forms, yet exists outside. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

The wind cannot be grasped and so it is closely analogous to the nature of *brahman.*

अशरीरो वायुः । अभ्रं विद्युत् स्तनयित्नुरशरीराण्येतानि । तद्यथैतान्यमुष्मादाकाशात् समुत्थाय परं ज्योतिरुपसंपद्य स्वेन रूपेनाभिनिष्पद्यन्ते ॥

ChUp VIII.12.2

The wind is bodiless. Clouds, lightning, thunder – these are bodiless.

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Now as these, when they arise from yonder space and reach the highest light, appear each with its own form... (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The dynamic nature of wind makes it ever alive, an aspect that was later excluded from a static vision of *brahman*.

स यथैषां प्राणानां मध्यमः प्राण एवमेतासां देवतानां वायुः । श्लोचन्ति ह्यन्या देवता न वायुः । सैषाऽनस्तमिता देवता यद्वायुः ॥

BṛUp I.5.22

As Breath holds the central position among the vital breaths (or functions), so wind among these divinities; for the other divinities have their decline, but not Wind. The wind is that divinity which never goes to rest. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

One of the early Upaniṣadic speculations concerning the all-pervading Reality is presented in the form of a progressive series of enquiries. The woman-philosopher Gārgī asks Yājñavalkya about "the thread on which all the worlds are interwoven".

कस्मिन्नु खलु वायुरोतश्च प्रोतश्चेति । अन्तरिक्षलोकेषु गार्गीति ।

BṛUp III.6.1

'On what then (after water) pray, is the wind woven, warp and woof? (Yājñavalkya replied) 'On the atmosphere-world, o Gārgī'. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

स होवाच – वायुर्वै गौतम तत् सूत्रम् । वायुना वै गौतम सूत्रेणायं च लोकः परश्च लोकः सर्वाणि च भूतानि संदृब्धानि भवन्ति । तस्माद्वै गौतम पुरुषं प्रेतमाहुर्व्यस्रंसिषतास्याङ्गानीति । वायुना हि गौतम सूत्रेण संदृब्धानि भवन्तीति ।

BṛUp III.7.2

He (i.e. Yājñavalkya) said: 'Wind, verily, O Gautama, is that thread. By wind, verily, O Gautama, as by a thread this world and the other world and all things are tied together. Therefore, verily, O Gautama, they say of a deceased person, 'His limbs become unstrung', for by wind, O Gautama, as by a thread, they are strung together. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

In the so-called *madhuvidyā* the interlocking of all things in the universe, and the transcendent immanence of the *ātman* is demonstrated by means of all the elements with the symbol of honey.

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अयं वायुः सर्वेषां भूतानां मधु । अस्य वायोः सर्वाणि भूतानि मधु । यश्चायमस्मिन् वायौ तेजोमयोऽमृतमयः पुरुषो यश्चायमध्यात्मं प्राणस्तेजोमयोऽमृतमयः पुरुषोऽयमेव स योऽयमात्मा । इदममृतमिदं ब्रह्मेदं सर्वम् ॥

BṛUp II.5.4

This wind is honey for all things, and all things are honey for this wind. This shining, immortal Person who is in this wind, and with reference to oneself, this shining immortal Person who is breath, he is just this Soul, this Immortal, this Brahma, this all. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

Vāyu is both concrete and universal. In Upaniṣadic terms, it is both individuality (*vyaṣṭi*), and totality (*samaṣṭi*) (BṛUp III.3.2). And "he who knows this wards off repeated death" (*ibid.*), because by knowing *vāyu* in this way, one shares in its all-pervasive nature.

A mythical metaphor in the **Kena Upaniṣad** illustrates both the power of *vāyu* as well as its impotence to touch the absolute Reality.

अथ वायुमब्रुवन् । वायवेतद्विजानीहि किमेतद्यक्षमिति । तथेति ॥ तदभ्यद्रवत् । तमभ्यवदत् कोऽसीति । वायुर्वा अहमस्मीत्यब्रवीन् मातरिश्वा वा अहमस्मीति ॥ तस्मिंस्त्वयि किं वीर्यमिति । अपीदं सर्वमाददीय यदिदं पृथिव्यामिति ॥ तस्मै तृणं निदधौ । एतदादत्स्वेति । तदुपप्रेयाय सर्वजवेन ।तन्न शशाकाऽऽदातुम् । स तत एव निववृते । नैतदशकं विज्ञातुं यदेतद्यक्षमिति ॥

KeUp III.7–10

Then they (the gods) said to Vāyu (wind): 'Vāyu, find out this – what this wonderful being is'. 'So be it'. He ran unto It. Unto him It spoke: 'Who are you?' 'Verily I am Vāyu' he said. 'Verily I am Mātariśvan'. 'In such as you what power is there?' 'Indeed I might carry off everything here, whatever there is here in the earth.'

It put down a straw before him. 'Carry that off!' He went at it with all speed. He was not able to carry it off. Thereupon indeed he returned, saying: 'I have not been able to find out this – what this wonderful being is.' (Tr. R.E. Hume)

तस्माद्वा एते देवा अतितरामिवान्यान्देवान् । यदग्निर्वायुरिन्द्रस्ते ह्येनन्नेदिष्ठं पस्पृशुः । ते ह्येनत्प्रथमो विदांचकार ब्रह्मेति ॥

KeUp IV.2

Therefore, verily, these gods, namely Agni, Vāyu, and Indra, are

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above the other gods, as it were: for these touched It nearest, for these and (especially) he (i.e. Indra) first knew It was Brahma. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The **Īśa Upaniṣad** seems to refer to this myth while describing the One in a paradoxical language. Here, as in the **Kena Upaniṣad**, the wind as a sense-power is unable to reach *brahman*, but as Mātariśvan it is the very dynamic power within the unmoving one; the life-force allotting to the forces of nature their respective functions.

अनेजदेकं मनसो जवीयो नैनद्देवा आप्नुवन् पूर्वमर्षत् ।
तद्धावतोऽन्यानत्येति तिष्ठत्तस्मिन्नपो मातरिश्वा दधाति ॥

ĪśUp 4

Unmoving, the one (*ekam*) is swifter than the mind.
The sense-powers (*devāḥ*) reached not It, speeding on before.
Past others running, this goes standing.
In It Mātariśvan places action. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

In the prayer for peace (*śāntimantra*) of the **Taittirīya Upaniṣad** *vāyu* is the element closest to *brahman*, and is therefore called *pratyakṣam brahma*. However, this expression can also refer indirectly to the teacher who proclaims *brahman* to the student.

नमो ब्रह्मणे । नमस्ते वायो । त्वमेव प्रत्यक्षं ब्रह्मासि । त्वामेव प्रत्यक्षं ब्रह्म वदिष्यामि । ऋतं वदिष्यामि । सत्यं वदिष्यामि । तन्मामवतु । तद्वक्तारमवतु । अवतु माम् । अवतु वक्तारम् । ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ।

TUp I.1.1

Adoration to Brahma! Adoration to thee, Vāyu!

Thou, indeed, art the perceptible Brahma. Of thee, indeed, the perceptible Brahma, will I speak. I will speak of the right (*ṛta*). I will speak of the true. Let that favour me! Let that favour the speaker! Let it favour me! Let it favour the speaker!
Om! Peace! Peace! Peace! (Tr. R.E. Hume)

As a deity, *vāyu* is subordinated to *brahman*, "from fear of whom (the gods) Agni, Sūrya, Indra, Vāyu and Death run" (KaṭhUp VI.3), but in another context *vāyu*, together with other gods, is an aspect of *brahman*. The three gods ruling over the three worlds become a trinity as the supreme Being unfolds itself:

स त्रेधात्मानं व्यकुरुतादित्यं तृतीयं वायुं तृतीयम् । स एष प्राणस्त्रेधा विहितः ।

BṛUp I.2.3

He (the Supreme Being) divided himself (*ātmānam*) threefold: [fire

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(*agni*) one third], the sun (*āditya*) one third, wind (*vāyu*) one third. He also is life (*prāṇa*) divided threefold. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

There is always a double process, from the cosmic to the microcosmic and vice-versa. As we have seen (cf. AitUp I.1.4), in the course of the creation of the world, the wind arises from the *prāṇa* of the great Being, whereas in the creation of man, it is *vāyu* that becomes *prāṇa* and enters the human body (cf. AitUp I.2.4). *Vāyu* is thus the mediator *par excellence* between the cosmic and the human.

स वायुरिवात्मानं कृत्वाभ्यन्तरं प्राविशत् । स एको नाशकत् । स पञ्चधात्मानं विभज्योच्यते यः प्राणोऽपानः समान उदानो व्यान इति । अथायं य ऊर्ध्वमुत्क्रामत्येष वाव स प्राणः । अथ योऽयमऽवाङ् संक्रामत्येष वाव सोऽपानः । अथ येन वैतानुगृहीतेत्येष वाव स व्यानः ।

MaitUp II.6

He (Prajāpati) made himself like wind and sought to enter within. As one, he was unable. So he divided himself fivefold – he who is spoken of as the *Prāṇa* breath, the Apāna breath, the Samāna breath, the Udāna breath, the Vyāna breath. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The idea is that the cosmic powers and the sense-organs arise from the wind/breath and again dissolve into it.

एतद्वै ब्रह्म दीप्यते यद्विद्युद्विद्योतते । अथैतन्म्रियते यन्न विद्योतते । तस्य वायुमेव तेजो गच्छति । वायुं प्राणः । ता वा एताः सर्वा देवता वायुमेव प्रविश्य वायौ सृप्ता न मृच्छन्ते । तस्मादेव उ पुनरुदीरते । इत्यधि-दैवतम् ॥

KauṣUp II.12

This Brahma, verily, shines when the lightning lightens; likewise this dies when it lightens not. Its brilliance goes to the wind; its vital breath, to the wind.

All these divinities, verily, having entered into wind, perish not when they die in the wind; therefrom indeed they come forth again.

Thus with reference to the divinities. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

Thus, when a person dies the vital breath (*prāṇa*) goes back to *vāyu* (cf. BṛUp III.2.13).

अथ प्राणमत्यवहत् । स यदा मृत्युमत्यमुच्यत स वायुरभवत् । सोऽयं वायुः परेण मृत्युमतिक्रान्तः पवते ॥

BṛUp I.3.13

Likewise it carried Breath across. When that was freed from death, it

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became wind. This wind, when it has crossed beyond death purifies. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The prayer of the dying person at the end of the **Īśa Upaniṣad** sounds like the summing-up of this conception of death: the life-breath goes to the wind, the body to ashes, or to the earth, and what remains is the purpose (*kratu*) and the *karma* of the person.

वायुरनिलममृतमथेदं भस्मान्तँ शरीरम् ।
ॐ क्रतो स्मर कृतँ स्मर क्रतो स्मर कृतँ स्मर ॥

ĪśUp 17

(My) breath (*vāyu*) to the immortal wind (*anila*)!
This body then ends in ashes! Om!

O purpose (*kratu*), remember! the deed (*kṛta*) remember!

O purpose, remember! The deed remember! (Tr. R.E. Hume)

Underlying this conception of death is the idea that *vāyu* and *prāṇa* ultimately absorb the major components of the macro- and microcosm into themselves.

वायुर्वाव संवर्गः । यदा वा अग्निरुद्वायति वायुमेवाप्येति । यदा सूर्योऽस्तमेति वायुमेवाप्येति । यदा चन्द्रोऽस्तमेति वायुमेवाप्येति ॥ यदाऽऽप उच्छुष्यन्ति वायुमेवापियन्ति । वायुर्ह्येवैतान् सर्वान् संवृङ्क्ते । इत्यधिदैवतम् ॥ अथाध्यात्मम् । प्राणो वाव संवर्गः । स यदा स्वपिति प्राणमेव वागप्येति । प्राणं चक्षुः । प्राणँ श्रोत्रम् । प्राणं मनः । प्राणो ह्येवैतान् सर्वान् संवृङ्क्त इति ॥ तौ वा एतौ द्वौ संवर्गौ । वायुरेव देवेषु प्राणः प्राणेषु ॥

ChUp IV.3.1–4

The wind (*vāyu*), verily, is a snatcher-unto-itself, verily, when a fire blows out, it just goes to the wind. When the sun sets, it just goes to the wind. When the moon sets, it just goes to the wind.

When water dries, goes up, it just goes to the wind. For the wind, truly, snatches all here to itself. Thus with reference to the divinities.

Now with reference to oneself –

Breath (*prāṇa*), verily, is a snatcher-unto-itself. When one sleeps, speech just goes to breath; the eye, to breath; the ear, to breath; the mind, to breath; for the breath, truly, snatches all here to itself.

Verily, these are two snatchers-unto themselves: the wind among the gods, breath among the vital breaths. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

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At the end of this process of absorption, the ultimate resting-place of all the elements is the *ātman*, just as birds find their resting-place in a tree (cf. PraUp IV.7–8).

We have dealt with the Upaniṣads at greater length, because their insights are fundamental to all the later speculations and disciplines.

The qualities of *vāyu* are described in many texts, and are presented systematically in the later philosophical literature. For example, describing the evolution of the elements with their respective qualities, the **Nirukta**, an early text, states:

> आकाशगुणः शब्दः । आकाशाद्वायुर्द्विगुणः स्पर्शेन । वायोर्ज्योतिस्त्रिगुणं रूपेण । ज्योतिष आपश्चतुर्गुणा रसेन । अद्भ्यः पृथिवी पञ्चगुणा गन्धेन । पृथिव्या भूतग्रामस्थावरजङ्गमाः । तदेतदहर्युगसहस्रं जागर्ति । तस्यान्ते सुषुप्स्यन्नङ्गानि प्रत्याहरति । भूतग्रामाः पृथिवीमपि यन्ति । पृथिव्यपः । आपो ज्योतिषम् । ज्योतिर्वायुम् । वायुराकाशम् । आकाशो मनः । मनो विद्याम् । विद्या महान्तमात्मानम् । महानात्मा प्रतिभाम् । प्रतिभा प्रकृतिम् ।
>
> Nir XIV.4
>
> Sound is the quality of space. Wind originates from space and possesses two qualities: sound and touch. Light (*jyotis*) originates from wind and possesses three qualities: sound, touch and form. Water originates from light and possesses four qualities: sound, touch, form and taste. The earth originates from the waters and possesses five qualities: sound, touch, form, taste and odour. The host of beings – mobile and immobile – originate from the earth which awakes for a thousand *yuga* long days. At the end of that period of sleep, it withdraws its limbs. Then the host of beings dissolves into the earth, the earth into water, water into light or heat, light into wind, wind into space, space into mind, mind into knowledge, knowledge into the great Self, and the great Self into illumined consciousness (*pratibhā*) and illumined consciousness into Nature (*prakṛti*). (Tr. S. Chattopadhyay)

Thus touch (*sparśa*), along with sound (*śabda*), is traditionally associated with the element wind. The other properties of *vāyu* are exhaustively described in the **Mahābhārata**:

> शब्दस्पर्शौ तु विज्ञेयौ द्विगुणो वायुरुच्यते ।
> वायव्यस्तु गुणः स्पर्शः स्पर्शश्च बहुधा स्मृतः ॥
> कठिनश्चिक्कणः श्लक्ष्णः पिच्छलो मृदुदारुणः ।

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उष्णः शीतः सुखो दुःखः स्निग्धो विशद एव च ।
एवं द्वादशविस्तारो वायव्यो गुण उच्यते ॥

MBh XII.177.33–34

Sound and touch are known as the two properties of wind. The property of the wind-element is touch. Touch is of various sorts: warm, cold, agreeable and disagreeable, indifferent, burning, mild, soft, light and heavy. Both sound and touch form the two properties of the wind-element. These are the twelve properties which belong to the wind. (Tr. M.N. Dutt)

वायोरनियमः स्पर्शो वादस्थानं स्वतन्त्रता ।
बलं शैघ्र्यं च मोहश्च चेष्टा कर्मकृता भवः ॥

MBh XII.247.6

The properties of the wind are touch that is neither hot nor cool, power to help the organs of speech, independence, strength, celerity, power to help all kinds of discharge, power to raise other objects, breaths inhaled and exhaled, life and birth. (Tr. M.N. Dutt)

In another context, *vāyu* is also said to be the bearer of all scents (*gandhavaha*, MBh XII.224.36). As a deity, *vāyu* is praised in the **Mahābhārata** as the moving principle behind all actions:

यद्धि किंचिदिह प्राणि शल्मले चेष्टते भुवि ।
सर्वत्र भगवान्वायुश्चेष्टाप्राणकरः प्रभुः ॥
एष चेष्टयते सम्यक्प्राणिनः सम्यगायतः ।
असम्यगायतो भूयश्चेष्टते विकृतो नृषु ॥

MBh XII.150.29–30

The illustrious wind-god is always the root of all the acts of creatures in this world, since it is he that is the giver of life. When that god does his work properly, he makes all living creatures live at their ease. When, however, he does it improperly, calamities visit the Earth. (Tr. M.N. Dutt)

In the **Bhagavad-Gītā**, Lord Kṛṣṇa speaks of his eightfold nature (*prakṛtiraṣṭadhā*, BhG VII.4) which includes the five elements, just as the *aṣṭamūrti* of Śiva does. In his **Bhagavad-Gītā Bhāṣya**, Śaṅkara describes the functions of *prāṇa*, the "vital air in the individual body" (*vāyurādhyātmikaḥ*, on BhG IV.27), as the two movements of contraction and expansion (*ākuñcana* and *prasāraṇa*). This double movement is fundamental, and it has become a

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model for all cosmic and spiritual processes in Kashmir Śaivism (where they are called *saṃkoca* and *vikāsa*, respectively).

The **Gītā** also mentions a negative characteristic of *vāyu* as a symbol of unsteadiness.

इन्द्रियाणां हि चरतां यन्मनोऽनुविधीयते ।
तदस्य हरति प्रज्ञां वायुर्नावमिवाम्भसि ॥

BhG II.67

Hither and thither the senses rove, and when the mind is attuned to them, it sweeps away (whatever of) wisdom a man may possess, as the wind (sweeps away) a boat on the water. (Tr. R.C. Zaehner)

The Darśanas classify *vāyu* as one of the *tattvas* or principles of reality, and associate it with the sensation of touch (*sparśa-tanmātra*).

स्पर्शगुणः सूक्ष्मतमो वायुः ... ।

BrSūBh II.2.16

Air is finest of all and has the quality of touch only. (Tr. G. Thibaut)

स्पर्शश्च वायोः ॥

VaiśSū II.1.9

Touch (is a mark) of Air. (Tr. N.L. Sinha)

According to Vaiśeṣika, *vāyu* is a subtle element whose existence can only be inferred, because it is invisibile:

न च दृष्टानां स्पर्श इत्यदृष्टलिङ्गो वायुः ॥

VaiśSū II.1.10

And it is not the Touch of the visible (substances); hence the mark (of the inferences) of Air is not the mark of the visible (substances). (Tr. N.L. Sinha)

The qualities of *vāyu* are the following:

वायुत्वाभिसंबन्धाद् वायुः । स्पर्शसंख्यापरिमाणपृथक्त्वसंयोगविभाग-परत्वापरत्वसंस्कारवान् ।

VaiśSūBh p. 111

Air is that which belongs to the class 'Air'. It has the following qualities: Touch, number, dimension, isolation, conjunction, disjunction, proximity, distance and faculty. (Tr. G.N. Jha)

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Vāyu, both as air and wind, is pluriform. This notion is expressed in the Veda mythically by identifying *vāyu* with the Maruts, the stormy winds. The Vaiśeṣika establishes this by indicating that when wind blows it collides with other air particles:

वायोर्वायुसंमूर्च्छनं नानात्वलिङ्गम् ॥

VaiśSū II.1.14

The collision of Air with Air is the mark of its plurality. (Tr. N.L. Sinha)

The **Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra** also says that the sun's rays cause the ascent of water through conjunction with air (*nāḍyo vāyusaṃyogāḍārohaṇam*, VaiśSū V.2.5). The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika view about *vāyu* has been succinctly stated in the **Bhāṣāpariccheda**:

अपाकजोऽनुष्णाशीतः स्पर्शस्तु पवने मतः ॥
तिर्यग्गमनवानेष ज्ञेयः स्पर्शादिलिङ्गकः ।
पूर्ववन्नित्यताद्युक्तं देहव्यापि त्वगिन्द्रियम् ॥

BhāPari 42cd–43

The touch of air is neither hot nor cold. It is not produced by heat. It is known as moving obliquely and is inferred by touch etc. The tactile organ pervades the entire body. Eternality is associated with it as before (in the case of fire and water).

The Mīmāṃsā holds that air is perceptible by the organ of skin (*tvac*). This school is mainly interested in the role of *vāyu* in the production of sound. It rejects the view that sound (*śabda*) is solely a product of air, and defends the eternal nature of *śabda* (cf. MīmSūBh I.1.22). But its description of the production of sound is worth quoting:

अभिघातेन हि प्रेरिता वायवः स्तिमितानि वाय्वन्तराणि प्रतिबाधमानाः सर्वतोदिङ्क्रान् संयोगविभागान् उत्पादयन्ति । यावद्वेगमभिप्रतिष्ठन्ते ।

MīmSūBh I.1.13

What happens is that the air-particles disturbed by the (sound provoking) stroke strike against the stagnant air-particles and produce conjunction and disjunctions (i.e. ripples) on all sides, which go on spreading as long as the momentum lasts. (Tr. G.N. Jha)

Mīmāṃsā texts also describe the transversal or zigzag motion of wind (*tiryaggamanasvabhāvo vāyuḥ*, Nyāyasiddhi Comm. by Nārāyaṇa on Prakaraṇapañcikā, p. 81).

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महता प्रयत्नेन शब्दं उच्चरन्ति – वायुर्नाभेरुत्थितः, उरसि विस्तीर्णः, कण्ठे विवर्तितः, मूर्द्धानमाहत्य परावृत्तः, वक्त्रे विचरन् विविधान् शब्दान् अभिव्यनक्ति ।

MīmSūBh I.3.25

It is with a considerable effort that people pronounce words, for instance, the wind rises from the navel, expands in the chest, undergoes evolutions in the throat, strikes the head, turns back and spreading over the regions of the mouth, renders manifest the various sounds. (Tr. G.N. Jha)

The view of Vedānta is expressed in the **Pañcadaśī**:

शोषस्पर्शौ गतिर्वेगः वायुधर्मा इमे मताः ।
त्रयः स्वभावाः सन्मायाव्योम्नां ये तेऽपि वायुगाः ॥

Pañcad II.79

The following are the properties air is known to possess: ability to absorb moisture, perceptibility to the sense of touch, speed and motion. Existence and the properties of Māyā and *ākāśa* are also found in air. (Tr. Swahananda)

Rāmānūja maintains that *prāṇa* and *vāyu* are not different from one another:

सोऽयं श्रेष्ठः प्राणः किं महाभूत द्वितीयवायुमात्रम्, तस्य वा स्पन्दरूपा क्रिया अथवा वायुरेव कञ्चन विशेषमापन्नः – इति विशये, वायुरेवेति प्राप्तम्, "यः प्राणः स वायुः" इति व्यपदेशात् ।

ŚrīBh II.4.8

Is this main vital breath nothing else but air, the second of the elements? Or is it a certain motion of the air? Or is it air that has assumed some special condition? The first alternative may be adopted, on account of the text 'prāṇa is air'. (Tr. G. Thibaut)

The Sāṃkhya system distinguishes *vāyu* as a *bhūta* or *tattva* (element) from the physical reality. The material cause of *vāyu-bhūta* is the subtle element of touch (*sparśatanmātra*), in which *sparśa* (touch) has lost all particularities.

The **Yuktidīpikā** on the **Sāṃkhya-Kārikā** enumerates the qualities of *vāyu*:

तिर्यग्गतिः पवित्रत्वमाक्षेपो नोदनं बलम् ।
रौक्ष्यमच्छायता शैत्यं वायोर्धर्माः पृथग्विधाः ॥

YuDīp on SāṃKā 38

The various characteristics (attributes) of air are: oblique motion, purity, felling, propulsion, power, aridity, it casts no shadow and is cold. (Tr. R.S. Bhattacharya)

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The **Vyāsa Bhāṣya** on the **Yoga-Sūtra** characterizes wind by its natural mobility (*vāyuḥ praṇāmī*, on YSū III.44).

The **Tarka Saṃgraha** gives a systematic description of *vāyu*:

रूपरहितस्पर्शवान् वायुः । स द्विविधो नित्योऽनित्यश्च । नित्यः परमाणुरूपः । अनित्यः कार्यरूपः । पुनस्त्रिविधः शरीरेन्द्रियविषयभेदात् । शरीरं वायुलोके । इन्द्रियं स्पर्शग्राहकं त्वक्सर्वशरीरवर्ति । विषयो वृक्षादिकम्पनहेतुः ॥

TarkSaṅg 13

Air has touch without colour (and form). It is of two sorts, eternal and non-eternal; eternal is atomic, non-eternal is product. It is again threefold, body, organ and mass; body is in the aerial world, organ is the sense of touch, apprehending touch and spreading over the whole body; mass is the cause of the shaking of trees, etc. (Tr. M.R. Bodas)

In Buddhist philosophy the *vāyodhātu* is explained thus:

कतमं तं रूपं वायोधातु ? यं वायो वायोगतं, छम्भितत्तं थम्भितत्तं रूपस्स, अज्झत्तं वा बहिद्धा वा, उपादिण्णं वा अनुपादिण्णं वा, इदं तं रूपं वायोधातु ।

DhSaṅ p. 227

What is that form which is air-element (*Vāyodhātu*)?

That which is air, belongs to air (the fluctuation), the inflation, of form, whether it be of the self, or external, or the issue of grasping or not the issue of grasping. (Tr. Rhys Davids)

Mastery over *vāyu* is attained by the practice of mindfulness of breathing:

आनापानस्मृतिः प्रज्ञा पञ्चभूर्वायुगोचरा । कामाश्रया ...

आननमान आश्वासो यो वायुः प्रविशति । अपाननमपानः प्रश्वासो यो वायुः निष्क्रामति । तयोः स्मृतिरानापानस्मृतिः ।

AbhidhKoBh VI.12

Mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasmṛti*) is *prajñā*, belonging to the five spheres, having wind for its object, and it is cultivated by beings in *Kāmadhātu.*

Bhāṣya:

Āna is in-breathing, the entry of wind; *apāna* is out-breathing, the leaving of the wind. The mindfulness (*smṛti*) that bears on both of these is *ānāpānasmṛti.* (Tr. L.M. Pruden)

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In Jaina cosmology we find an interesting conception that the earths are supported by air:

सर्वाः सप्तापि भूमयो घनवातप्रतिष्ठा वर्तन्ते । स च घनवातः अम्बुवातप्रतिष्ठोऽस्ति । स चाम्बुवातस्तनुवातप्रतिष्ठो वर्तते । स च तनुवात आकाशप्रतिष्ठो भवति । आकाशस्य अवलम्बनं किमपि नास्ति ।

TVṛ III.1.111.19

All these seven earths are supported by the humid air. Humid air is supported by dense air. Dense air is in thin air and thin air is in space (*ākāśa*). There is no support for space (since it is self supported). (Tr. Sadananda)

आसां भूमीनामालम्बननिर्ज्ञानार्थं घनाम्बुवातादिग्रहणं क्रियते । घनाम्बु च वातश्च आकाशं च घनाम्बुवाताकाशानि । तानि प्रतिष्ठा आश्रयो यासां ता घनाम्बु वाताकाशप्रतिष्ठाः । सर्वा एता भूमयो घनोदधिवलयप्रतिष्ठाः । घनोदधिवलयं घनवातवलयप्रतिष्ठम् । घनवातवलयं तनुवातवलयप्रतिष्ठम् । तनुवातवलयमाकाश प्रतिष्ठम् । आकाशमात्मप्रतिष्ठम् । तस्यैवाधार आधेयत्वात् । त्रीण्येतानि वलयानि प्रत्येकं विंशतियोजनसहस्रबाहुल्यानि ।

SaSi III.1

The circles of atmosphere are mentioned in order to indicate the support of these seven earths. *Ghanāmbu ca vātaśca ākāśaṃ ca ghanāmbuvātākāśāni.* Those which have these for their support are *ghanāmbuvātākāśapratiṣṭhāḥ.* All these (seven) earths (which comprise the infernal regions) are surrounded by the circle of humid atmosphere. The sheath of humid atmosphere is supported by the circle of dense air. The circle of dense air rests in thin air which rests in space. And space rests in itself, as it is itself the support and the supported. Each of these three circles (zones) is of the extent of twenty thousand *yojanas.* (Tr. S.A. Jain)

In Jaina Darśana *vāyu* is considered as a worldly soul (*saṃsārī jīva*) among six worldly souls such as earth, water, fire wind, plants and movable creatures (*trasa*), having only one sense organ (*ekendriya*, i.e. touch). It has been described as being of four types: wind (in general), wind body, life in wind body and life tending towards wind body (cf. Mūl 205). Further some other varieties of wind are also found which are included in these four types.

वादुब्भामो उक्कलि मण्डलि गुंजा महा घण तणू य ।
ते जाण वाउजीवा जाणित्ता परिहरेदव्वा ॥

Mūl 212

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Whirling wind (which goes upwards), the wind that moves downwards (*ukkali*), the wind turning round (*maṇḍali*), the wind which produces sound (*guñjā-vāyu*), the stormy wind (*mahā-vāyu*), the humid wind (*ghana-vāyu*) and the thin wind (*tanu-vāyu*) – know them as the living body and do not cause injury to them. (Tr. Sadananda)

In Vaiṣṇava theology, Viṣṇu is praised in one of his forms as *vāyu*:

पञ्चधावस्थितो देहे यश्चेष्टां कुरुतेऽनिशम् ।
आकाशयोनिर्भगवांस्तस्मै वाय्वात्मने नमः ॥

ViPur I.14.31

We bow to him who is one with air, the origin of ether, existing as the five vital airs in the body, causing constant vital action. (Tr. H.H. Wilson)

In the **Viṣṇu-Sahasranāma**, one of Viṣṇu's names is *vāyu*, which is explained as follows:

वाति गन्धं करोति इति वायुः । पुण्यो गन्धः पृथिव्यां च ... ।

ViSahasrBh 57

The Wafter of fragrance. Vāyu is so called because it blows, conveys odour. The Lord says (BhG VII.9): 'I am the agreeable odour of the earth'. (Tr. R.A. Sastry)

Viṣṇu is also addressed as the *puruṣa*, 'from whose ears comes the wind' (*anilaḥ śrotrāt*, ViPur I.12.64).

The activities of air or wind are described in the **Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā**, in a manner which is consistent with the Upaniṣads:

जायते स्पर्शवान् वायुस्तस्मादपि च जायते ।
शोषणं प्रेरणं चेष्टा व्यूहनं च समूहनम् ॥
क्रियाभेदा इमे तस्माज्जायन्ते वायुतो मुने ।

AhSam VII.26–27ab

Air, which is tactile, is also born from that. O sage, the actions born of that (element) air are cessation, impulse, motion, arranging and gathering together. (Tr. M. Dyczkowski)

In the **Bhāgavata Purāṇa**, the evolution of air from atmospheric space and its qualities are vividly described:

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नभसोऽथ विकुर्वाणादभूत् स्पर्शगुणोऽनिलः ।
परान्वयाच्छब्दवांश्च प्राण ओजः सहो बलम् ॥

Bhāg Pur II.5.26

Because the sky is transformed, the air is generated with the quality of touch and by previous succession the air is also full of sound and the basic principles of duration of life: sense perception, mental power and bodily strength. (Tr. Prabhupada)

मृदुत्वं कठिनत्वं च शैत्यमुष्णत्वमेव च ।
एतत्स्पर्शस्य स्पर्शत्वं तन्मात्रत्वं नभस्वतः ॥
चालनं व्यूहनं प्राप्तिर्नेतृत्वं द्रव्यशब्दयोः ।
सर्वेन्द्रियाणामात्मत्वं वायोः कर्माभिलक्षणम् ॥

BhāgPur III.26.36–37

Softness and hardness and cold and heat are the distinguishing attributes of touch, which is characterized as the subtle form of air. The action of the air is exhibited in movements, mixing, allowing approach of the objects of sound and other sense perceptions and providing for the proper functioning of all other senses. (Tr. Prabhupada)

Vāyu is a constantly active principle and, as such, should be associated with *rajas* among the *guṇas*, but because it is associated with the subtle element of touch (*sparśa-tanmātra*), it arises out of *tamas*, as said in the Āgamas:

... स्पर्शतन्मात्रं तामसं समुदाहृतम् ॥
तत्क्षोभादभवद्वायुर्द्विगुणो व्यूहलक्षणः ।
शब्दस्पर्शसमायोगात्स्वभावेन सदागतिः ॥

MPĀ vp XX.1cd–2

The subtle element of touch is said to be related by the quality of *tamas*. The wind is born from its disturbance. It has two qualities and its characteristic is expansion (*vāyu*), because it is associated with sound and touch and is continuously moving. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

The Purāṇas also describe the functions of *vāyu*. In the following passage, the names of these functions are all derived from the root *vah*-, to blow.

प्रवहो निवहश्चैव उद्वहो संवहस्तथा ॥
प्रवाहो विवहश्चैव परिवाहस्तथैव च ।

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अन्तरिक्षे च बाह्ये ते पृथङ्मार्गविचारणाः ॥
महेन्द्रप्रविभक्ताङ्गा मरुतः सप्त कीर्तिताः ।

DPur 46.30cd-32ab

There are seven (kinds of) air, namely Pravaha, Nivaha, Udvaha, Saṃvaha, Pravāha, Vivaha and Parivāha. Air was divided by Indra. In the atmosphere and in the external world they roam into different regions. (Tr. R.S. Bhattacharya)

These seven forms of *vāyu* are located in different parts of the universe.

पृथिव्यां प्रथमस्कन्धो द्वितीयश्चैव भास्करे ।
सोमे तृतीयो विज्ञेय श्चतुर्थो ज्योतिषां गणे ॥
ग्रहेषु पञ्चमश्चैव षष्ठः सप्तर्षिमण्डले ।
ध्रुवे तु सप्तमश्चैव वातस्कन्धः परस्तु सः ॥

VāPur 67.111–112

The first *skandha* is on the earth, the second is in the sun, the third is to be found in the moon and the fourth in the host of lights. The fifth is among the planets and the sixth in the circle of the seven *ṛṣis*. The seventh is fixed in the Pole Star, this is the highest form of wind.

The **Skanda Purāṇa** says that it is in the seventh *vāyu-skandha* that the gods dwell (cf. also MBh XII.328.31–38).

The Purāṇas and texts on Jyotiṣa contain the conception of the universe in which the sun, moon and planets are bound to the Pole Star (*Dhruva*) by wind-cords.

सूर्याचन्द्रमसौ तारा नक्षत्राणि ग्रहैः सह ।
वातानीकमयैर्बन्धैर्ध्रुवे बद्धानि तानि वै ॥

ViPur II.9.3

As Dhruva revolves, it causes the moon, sun, and stars to turn round, also; and the lunar asterisms follow in its circular path: for all the celestial luminaries are, in fact, bound to the polar star by aerial cords. (Tr. H.H. Wilson)

These cords are also called *vāta-raśmi*, and they constitute the invisible connection between the stars and planets (cf. VāPur 52.83–88).

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Manifestation in the Arts

Vāyu is the most mobile element and stands at the juncture between the gross elements and the imperceptible *ākāśa*, as such it plays an important role in all art-forms. Its intimate relation, if not identity, with *prāṇa* makes it the medium of music and dance. Right from the Veda, sound is associated with wind. Whereas →*ākāśa* is the space or channel carrying sound, *vāyu* is itself the producer of sound, from the subtle sound of a breeze to the roaring noise of a thunderstorm. In the production of voice, the controlled use of breath is essential. Accordingly, in the Veda *vāyu* has been called a 'singer of praise', *stotā*, (ŚBr XIII.2.6.2) and, among the three Vedas, it has been associated with the **Sāma-Veda**.

अन्तरिक्षमेवर्क् । वायुः साम । तदेतदेतस्यामृच्यध्यूढं साम । तस्मादृच्यध्यूढं साम गीयते । अन्तरिक्षमेव सा । वायुरमः । तत्साम ॥

ChUp I.6.2

The Ṛk is the atmosphere; the Sāman is the wind. This Sāman rests upon that Ṛk. *Sā* is the atmosphere; *ama* is the wind that makes *sāma*. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

Along with other gods, *vāyu* is associated with various *Sāman* songs, with the *udgītha* or with the *prastāva* (cf. ChUp II.21.1; II.20.1).

Therefore *vāyu* is later called *śabdayogin*, 'conjoined with sound', the one who produces the seven musical notes (*svaras*) and is ever bringing forth musical sound.

यः प्राणः सर्वभूतानां पञ्चधाभिद्यते नृषु ।
सप्तधातुगतो लोकांस्त्रीन्दधार चचार च ॥
यमाहुरग्निकर्त्तारं सर्वप्रभवमीश्वरम् ।
सप्तस्वरगतोयश्च नित्यङ्गीर्भिरुदीर्यते ॥
यं वदन्त्युत्तमं भूतं यं वदन्त्यशरीरिणम् ।
यमाहुराकाशगमं शीघ्रगंशब्दयोगिनम् ॥
स वायुः सर्वभूतायुरुद्भूतः स्वेन तेजसा ।

MatPur CLXXIV.28–31ab

Vāyu, who rises as the life of all beings by his own glorious energy, the fivefold life-breath of all living beings, he has entered the seven elements and is moving in the three worlds, he is called the creator of fire, the Lord and maker of all, present in the seven notes and ever praised in all the songs, he is called the foremost of the (cosmic) elements, the bodiless, moving in space, swift-moving, the producer of sound.

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The **Nāṭya-Śāstra** establishes the relation between air or wind and sound in clear terms:

वाय्वात्मको भवेच्छब्दः स चापि द्विविधो मतः ।
स्वरवांश्चैव विज्ञेयस्तथा चैवाभिधानवान् ॥
तत्राभिधानवान् नाम नानाभाषासमाश्रयः ।
स्वरवानपि विज्ञेयो नानातोद्यसमाश्रयः ॥

NŚ XXXIV.28–29

Śabda (sound) is of the nature of air or is made up of air; that also is accepted as two-fold; viz. *svaravān* (tonal) and *abhidhānavān* or verbal i.e. that which is composed of words.

Out of these the *abhidhānavān* or verbal sound is rooted in various languages; and the *svaravān* is to be known as being rooted in various instruments (including the human voice). (Tr. P.L. Sharma)

The distinction between *svaravān* and *abhidhānavān* is later known as *nāda*, pure sound, and *varṇa*, verbal sound (cf. also AbhiBhā, BṛD IX.10.20–21, etc.).

Since the production of sound is entirely dependent on the different functions of air and the breath, the **Saṅgīta-Ratnākara** gives a detailed account of the five functions of *prāṇa* (cf. SR I.2.61–68) in the body (→*prāṇa*). Besides this, the author also gives a classification of nine or ten different qualities of breath which play an important role in determining the quality of the voice.

स्वस्थौ चलौ प्रवृद्धश्च निरस्तोल्लासितावपि ।
विमुक्तो विस्मितः श्वासः स्खलितः प्रसृतस्तथा ॥
एवमुच्छ्वास निःश्वासौ नवधा कोहलोदितौ ।
समो भ्रान्तो विलीनश्चान्दोलितः कम्पितोऽपरः ॥
स्तम्भितोच्छ्वासनिश्वाससूत्कृतानि च सीत्कृतम् ।
एवं दशविधः प्रोक्तो लक्ष्यज्ञैर्मारुतोऽपरैः ॥

SR VII.474–476

The inhaling and exhaling (of breath) is known to be ninefold according to the opinion of Kohala; viz. *svastha* (healthy or natural), *cala* (dynamic), *pravṛddha* (speeded up), *nirasta* (abandoned), *ullasita* (heightened), *vimukta* (released), *vismita* (wonderstruck), *skhalita* (slipped), and *prasṛta* (spread out). By others air (breath) has been spoken of as being tenfold; viz. *sama* (equal), *bhrānta* (rotated), *vilīna* (merged), *āndolita* (swung), *kampita* (trembling), *stambhita* (standstill), *ucchvāsa* (exhaling), *niḥśvāsa* (inhaling),

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sūtkṛta (having the sound '*su*'), and *sītkṛta* (having the sound '*si*'). (Tr. P.L. Sharma)

Obviously, besides the human voice, the wind instruments are closely connected with *vāyu*. In them, the internal *prāṇa* and the external air are combined to produce sound. In the course of describing the flute, the **Saṅgīta-Ratnākara** mentions the *vāyurandhra*:

तेष्वष्टासूर्ध्वरन्ध्राणि सप्त स्युः स्वरसिद्धये ॥
अन्तिमं वायुरन्ध्रं स्यादन्तरालानि सप्त च ।

SR VI.532cd–533ab

Out of those eight holes, the seven upper ones are meant for manifesting *svaras* and the last one is known as *vāyurandhra* i.e. the hole for wind. There are seven intervals. (Tr. P.L. Sharma)

The qualities of the sound produced by wind instruments are described thus:

स्निग्धता घनता रक्तिर्व्यक्तिः प्रचुरता ध्वनेः ।
लालित्यं कोमलत्वं च नादानुरणनं तथा ॥
त्रिस्थानत्वं श्रावकत्वं माधुर्यं सावधानता ।
द्वादशेति गुणाः प्रोक्ताः फूत्कारे सूरिशार्ङ्गिणा ॥

SR VI.654–655

Creaminess, density, delight, clarity, profusion of sound, beauty, softness and resonance of *nāda* (sound), the quality of covering the three registers and of being heard from a distance, sweetness (and) concentration – these twelve have been said to be good qualities of blowing in wind instruments (*phūtkāra*), specially the flute. (Tr. P.L. Sharma)

Vāyu is not only the producer of sound, but also the origin of motion. His nature as moving swiftly in different directions has been praised since the Vedas. The dynamic play of the winds has been described as the dance of the Maruts:

मर्तश्चिद् वो नृतवो रुक्मवक्षस उप भ्रातृत्वमायति ।
अधि नो गात मरुतः सदा हि व आपित्वमस्ति निध्रुवि ॥

ṚV VIII.20.22

Even mortal man, ye Dancers breast-adorned with gold, attains to brotherhood with you.
Mark ye and notice us, O Maruts; evermore your friendship is secured to us. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

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Here the term *nṛtavaḥ* is used; elsewhere the movement of the Maruts is described as playful (*marudbhyaḥ krīḍibhyaḥ*, 'by the play of the Maruts', TSam I.8.4.2).

Because of this association of the wind with the playful movement or dance, Abhinavagupta praises the wind-form (*samīramūrti*) of Śiva in his benedictory verse in the **Abhinava Bhāratī** thus:

स्वविलासैरिदं विश्वं यो दर्शयति सन्ततम् ।
समीरमूर्तिं तं वन्दे गिरिराजसुताप्रियम् ॥

AbhiBhā on NŚ IV.1

I worship the aerial body of the lover of the daughter of the king of the mountains, who constantly manifests this universe by his playful movements.

In the context of sculpture, *vāyu* plays a role in at least two different ways. The first concerns the very conception of the divine bodies which are represented in sculpture. According to the **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa**, the bodies of the gods are filled with *vāyu* or consist of *vāyu*:

वामदेव्यमात्मन् । प्राणो वै वामदेव्यम् । वायुरु प्राणः । सर्वेषामु हैष देवानामात्मा – यद्वायुः । वायुमेवास्यैतदात्मानं करोति । अथो आत्मानमे वास्यैतदनस्थिकममृतं करोति ॥

ŚBr IX.1.2.38

The Vāmadevya (hymn the Adhvaryu sings) on the body (of the altar); for the Vāmadevya is the breath, and the breath is air (Vāyu, the wind) and he, *vāyu*, doubtless, is the self (body) of all the gods: he thus makes the air (wind) his body, and that body of his he thus makes boneless and immortal. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

This is the Vedic background of the later conception of divine images which appear to be full of *prāṇa*, although without showing muscles.

तस्माद्वा एतस्मादन्नरसमयात् । अन्योऽन्तर आत्मा प्राणमयः । तेनैष पूर्णः । स वा एष पुरुषविध एव ।

TUp II.2

Verily, other than and within that one that consists of the essence of food is the self that consists of breath. By that this is filled. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

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Figure 15: Vāyu as *dikpāla*: Rājarāṇī Temple, Bhubaneswar, ca 1025 A.D.

This implies that the divine body is filled with the essence of life and with spirit, both of which are implicit in *vāyu-prāṇa*. Besides, there is a yogic-tāntric background to the conception of divine images which is connected with the retention of the breath (*kumbhaka*). The yogic body filled with *prāṇa* is given visual expression in divine images. In her interpretation of the image of the Buddha, Stella Kramrisch relates the concept of *vāyu-prāṇa* to the divine body. "His body is the circumambient substance of the breath that moves throughout it and swells its limbs into a steady roundness... Pneumatic dilatation, fluid curves, and the smooth roundness of the body are their (i.e. the craftsmen's) modes of visualization for they are aware 'that all joints are joint with breath'." ("Emblems of the Universal Being", p. 135). Similarly, Alice Boner, in her interpretation of Śiva as Naṭarāja, and of Śiva Dakṣiṇāmūrti in Elura, relates these images to the universal breath of the Paramātman, whose outbreathing "corresponds to the outflow of Manifestation. It is his inbreathing that represents the reabsorption of the world of created things into the Unmanifest. That is

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Figure 16: Vāyu: according to *dhyānaśloka* of Pratiṣṭhālakṣaṇasārasamuccaya (Nepal MS)

why Dakṣiṇāmūrti is represented here in the act of breathing in, with expanded chest, absorbing into himself what in future aeons, at his pleasure, he may pour out again. ... His form, radiating with joy, is like a powerful magnet attracting into its orbit all that exists, and the inflow from all quarters is blissfully obeying this centripetal force of intension, involution and absorption... All individual prāṇas (life-breaths) are exhaled into him and drawn into the universal Prāṇa in his expanded chest. The centre of the whole composition is in Śiva's Prāṇa-cakra, the seat of the Lifebreath" (*Principles of Composition*, p. 203).

Vāyu is also represented as one of the guardians of the quarters (*dikpālas*, →*deśa*) who guards the north-west of the temple. He has the following iconographical features:

वायुरूपं प्रवक्ष्यामि धूम्रन्तु मृगवाहनम् ॥
चित्राम्बरधरं शान्तं युवानं कुञ्चितभ्रुवम् ।
मृगाधिरूढं वरदं पताकाध्वजसंयुतम् ॥

MatPur CCLXI.18cd–19

The image of Vāyu should be made seated on a deer, smoky in complexion, nicely dressed looking quite young, with knitted brows, adorned with banners, granting boons.

But there is another dimension of *vāyu* represented in sculpture. Wind implies dynamism and movement. Though sculpture appears to be static, it has

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a dynamic aspect, whenever movement is shown. In the composition of a figure or a panel, the diagonal lines expressing movement are called 'wind-lines' or *māruta-rekhā*. The reason for this is that the movement of the wind or breath has been understood to be oblique (*tiryag gati*).

प्राणेन तिर्यङ् प्राणति यस्मिन् ज्येष्ठमधि श्रितम् ॥

AV X.8.19cd

He breathes obliquely with his breath, he on whom what is highest rests. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

Describing the lines of the diagram for an image-panel (*pañjara*), the **Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad** calls the diagonals wind-lines:

कर्णद्वयं मरुद्भावेन आचरन्ति ॥
यथा मरुदप्संयोगात् फेनो भवति । पुनः फेनाद् बुद्बुदः सम्भवति, तथा चतुरस्रं कर्णरेखायुग्मसंयोगादूपक्षेत्रं सक्रियं भवतीति । सा मारुतकीलस्य क्रियाप्रतीतिः ।

VSUp II.12

Two diagonals are drawn in the nature of wind.
As from the contact of water and wind foam arises, again in the foam bubbles arise, thus when the square is joined with the diagonals that relief-field becomes active. This is the understanding of the action of the diagonal (wind) lines. (Tr. A. Boner - B. Bäumer)

These wind-lines produce an energetic and aggressive expression in the image:

मारुतरेखायां तैजसरूपाणि ॥
तिक्ष्णभावप्रदायकानि योधरूपाण्युपजायन्ते । तानि सर्वाणि भीषणरूपार्थम् । कर्णजा रेखा ग्राह्या इत्थं रूपकर्मार्थम् ।

VSUp II.25

On the diagonal (wind) lines fiery (energetic) forms are produced.

They are givers of a violent mood and produce fighting figures. For giving them all a terrifying form or expression diagonal lines have to be used. This is for the purpose of the creation of form. (Tr. A. Boner - B. Bäumer)

Even more static than sculpture is architecture. But even in the apparently frozen structure of a temple, the dynamism of the wind-element is present. We find some hints to this symbolism in the Śilpa-Śāstras.

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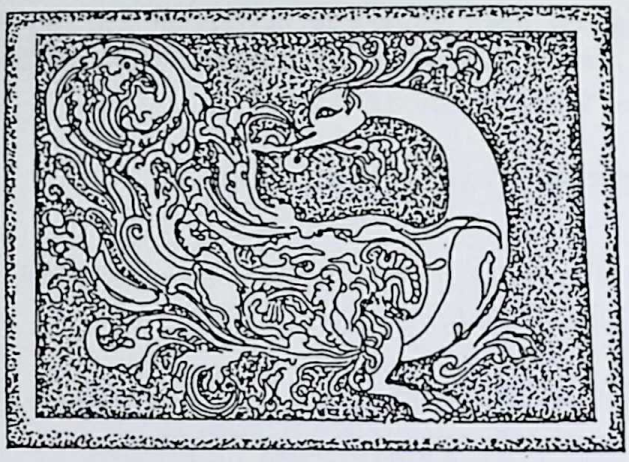

Figure 17: *Haṃsalatā*: Virūpākṣa Temple, Aihole, ca 740 A.D.

In the **Śilparatnakośa**, which describes the temple-architecture of Orissa, one of the five mouldings of the *pañcakarma*, the sharp-edged *kaṇi*, is said to appear 'as if blown by the wind' (v. 94). Since it projects sharply, it has a certain dynamic character. But the conscious symbolism of the *pañcakarma*, the base mouldings of the temple, implies the conception of the temple as a microcosm, based on the five cosmic elements, where *vāyu* is the last-but-one, below the *vyoma-paṭṭa* symbolizing *vyoman* or space (cf. ŚiRaKo v. 84 ff).

There is another way in which the element air is implicit in the symbolism of temple-architecture. The temple is conceived as the body of the *Puruṣa* (cf. ŚiRaKo v. 7–15; AgPur 61.11), and as a living body it has openings for the air which is breath. Thus, the *śikhara* of the Rekha temple has holes on the upper part which are called *rāhāśvāsa* 'breath of the *rāhā*' (ŚiRaKo v. 351). Thus the whole structure of the temple is not only based on the elements, but is pervaded by the living breath of the cosmos.

One of the symbols for freedom of movement (*kāmacāra*) in the Indian tradition is the *haṃsa*, the goose or swan, which also stands for the freedom of the ascetic or *jīvanmukta*. In architectural reliefs, the *haṃsa*, a symbol of wind, is often shown with a creeper-like tail (hence called *haṃsalatā*) which stresses the bird's dynamism and the animal-vegetation continuum.

Examples of such relations could be multiplied, but those quoted here should suffice to show the richness of the symbolism of *vāyu-prāṇa* in the Arts.

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Conclusion

To sum up, the element *vāyu* has various associations with the Arts. One is the conception that all artistic creation resembles the creation of the universe, and therefore the five elements are the basis and also building blocks of the corresponding art-forms. Within this general view, *vāyu* fulfills a very special function because of its inherent dynamism and freedom of movement. Fire and water are also dynamic elements, but their movement can only extend in a certain direction, upward or downward, whereas *vāyu* is praised for its all-round movement. Why it is especially associated with the oblique or transversal movements, it may be because this represents a free and unconditioned movement. Besides, the vertical and the horizontal movement have a certain static character, like the flow of a big river, which, though in constant movement, represents a horizontal line. The psychological effect of an oblique line evokes in the observer a feeling of dynamic power (cf. VSUp quoted above).

Vāyu is thus significant in the context of the Arts as an element, a medium as well as a building block, as a process and as a symbol of the dynamism of the spirit and hence of freedom.

Bettina Bäumer
'Etymology' by Sukumar Chattopadhyay

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Appendix: Vāyu/Vāta in Āyurveda

by L.M. Singh

Vāyu and *vāta* are used synonymously in Āyurveda, *vāta* being the most important member of the triumvirate–*tridoṣa*. The concept of *tridoṣa* is fundamental to Āyurveda (→*guṇa*, Vol. IV) which has been derived from the *pañcamahābhūta* concept of Indian philosophy and adapted and used for understanding body physiology, development of disease process and for management of the disease. Thus our body as the phenomenal universe is composed of *pañcamahābhūta* and *tridoṣa* – *vāyu, pitta* and *kapha* represent the operative and dynamic aspects of *pañcamahābhūta* in a living state. They are the structural components of our body, they maintain our body as →*dhātus* (Vol. IV), they are responsible for our normal body functions but when deranged vitiate the body hence *doṣa* causes disease and we regain health when they are brought to normal proportions.

Among the three *doṣas vāyu* is the most important one as it provides the motive force to all other *doṣas* and body constituents. Without *vāyu* all other components are static. *Vāyu* has not only been conceived in its temporal form of wind, but in terms of its attributes of motion. In fact, it is a form of energy which regulates and maintains all our body activities. Thus the concept of *vāyu* has its philosophical context in the *pañcamahābhūta* theory, it is a structural content of the body, it plays a vital role in the body physiology and specifically maintains and regulates the body functions and also causes varied and serious diseases when deranged, more than any other *doṣa*.

In accordance with the *pañcamahābhūta* concept *vāyu* is an integral component of the phenomenal world. All material constitutes are composed of the five elements.

> पृथिव्यप्तेजो वाय्वाकाशानां समुदायात् द्रव्याभिनिर्वृत्तिः, ... ।
>
> SuSam SūSthā XLI.3
>
> All material is composed of the combination of *Pṛthivī, Ap, Tejas, Vāyu* and *Ākāśa*.
>
> सर्वं द्रव्यं पाञ्चभौतिकमस्मिन्नर्थे; तच्चेतनावदचेतनञ्च, ... ।
>
> CarSam SūSthā XXVI.10
>
> In Āyurveda all material, whether living or nonliving, is considered to be composed of *pañcamahābhūta*.

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Further our body which is the abode of consciousness is also composed of *pañcamahābhūta*, and *vāyu* as a sign of life (*prāṇa*).

शरीरं नाम चेतनाधिष्ठानभूतं पञ्चमहाभूतविकारसमुदायात्मकं समयोगवाहि ।

CarSam ŚāSthā VI.4

The body is defined as the seat of consciousness, composed of an aggregate of the products of five *mahābhūtas* and in a state of equilibrium.

षड्धातवः समुदिताः 'लोक' इति शब्दं लभन्ते; तद्यथा – पृथिव्यापस्तेजो वायुराकाशं ब्रह्म चाव्यक्तमिति, एत एव च षड्धातवः समुदिता 'पुरुष' इति शब्दं लभन्ते ॥

CarSam ŚāSthā V.4

The aggregate of six constituents is termed as universe (macrocosm) such as *Pṛthivī, Ap, Tejas, Vāyu, Ākāśa* and unmanifest *Brahman.* The aggregate of these six constituents is termed as person.

In the individual *vāyu* constitutes the '*prāṇa*' – vital breath or sign of life (cf. *tasya puruṣasya ... vāyuḥ*, CarSam ŚāSthā V.5)

Vāyu as a Physical Component of the Body

Vāyu in the living person is manifested as below:

यदुच्छ्वास-प्रश्वासोन्मेष-निमेषाकुञ्चन-प्रसारण-गमन-प्रेरण-धारणादि तद्वायवीयं स्पर्शः स्पर्शनञ्च; ... ।

CarSam ŚāSthā VII.16

Respiration, twinkling of eye, contraction and relaxation, movement, propulsion and retention alongwith touch and tactile sense are *vāyavīya* (predominant in *vāyumahābhūta*). (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

वाय्वात्मकं स्पर्शः स्पर्शनं रौक्ष्यं प्रेरणं धातुव्यूहनं चेष्टाश्च शारीर्यः, ... ।

CarSam ŚāSthā IV.12

Touch, the tactile organ, roughness, impulsion (motivation), organisation of the body constituents and physical activities are derived from *vāyu.*

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Whatever is manifested as respiration, blinking of the eye, contraction and relaxation, movement, propulsion and retention, touch and tactile sense, all these functions are due to *vāyu.*

Further *vāyu* is the cause of (cellular) division in the embryonic stage and also of conjunction and division later.

तं (च गर्भं) चेतनावस्थितं वायुर्विभजति, ... ।

SuSam ŚāSthā V.3

Vāyu divides the *garbha* – zygote the seat of consciousness.

शरीरावयवास्तु परमाणुभेदेनापरिसंख्येया भवन्ति, ... तेषां संयोगविभागे परमाणूनां कारणं वायुः कर्मस्वभावश्च ।

CarSam ŚāSthā VII.17

The organs of the body have innumerable components and the cause of (their) division and conjunction is *vāyu* because of its inherent action.

Besides the existential material basis of *pañcamabhābhūta*, the concept of *vāyu* has been further elaborated as one of the *tridoṣa.*

"These *pañcamahābhūtas* are known as *vāta, pitta, śleṣmā* in the living body and in Āyurveda *vāta, pitta, śleṣmā* are considered as progenitor and conductor of the body and of body functions. Whereas *pañcamahābhūta* form the material basis, *tridoṣa* constitute the operative factors in the living body" (Hari Datta Vaidya, '*Tridoṣa-Saṅgraha*').

In the living body *vāyu* is derived from the elements *ākāśa* and *vāyu* and is manifest in its own form. *Pitta* originates from *tejas* and *kapha* from *jala* and *pṛthivī.*

वायोरात्मैवात्मा, ... ।

SuSam SūSthā XLII.5

The *vāyu* is a self-origined principle in the human organism. (Tr. K.L. Bhisagratna)

The concept of *tridoṣa* is fundamental to Āyurveda. *Tridoṣa* is the basis of genesis, maintainance and dissolution of the body.

वातपित्तश्लेष्माण एव देहसंभवहेतवः । ... शरीरमिदं धार्यतेऽगारमिव स्थूणाभिस्तिसृभिः, अतश्च त्रिस्थूणमाहुरेके । त एव च व्यापन्नाः प्रलयहेतवः ।

SuSam SūSthā XXI.3

Vāta, pitta and *kapha* are the cause of the genesis of the body ...

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They maintain the body like a house on three pillars and hence the body is called *tristhūṇa*. When vitiated they cause destruction of the body.

नर्ते देहः कफादस्ति न पित्तान्न च मारुतात् ।

SuSam SūSthā XXI.4ab

This body cannot exist without *kapha* or *pitta* or *vāyu*.

दोषधातुमलमूलं हि शरीरं, ... ।

SuSam SūSthā XV.3

Doṣa, dhātu and *mala* are the basis of this body.

The importance of these three *doṣas* has been further emphasized as the counterparts of the celestial forces of sun, moon and air.

विसर्गादानविक्षेपैः सोमसूर्यानिला यथा ।
धारयन्ति जगद्देहं कफपित्तानिलास्तथा ॥

SuSam SūSthā XXI.8

As the moon, sun and air maintain the world by their function of emission, absorption and movements, similarly *kapha, pitta* and *vāyu* also maintain the body.

Inspite of their supporting function they are known as *doṣa* as they vitiate the body in their abnormal state.

वायुः पित्तं कफश्चोक्तः शारीरो दोषसंग्रहः ।

CarSam SūSthā I.57ab

Vāyu, pitta and *kapha* are the three vitiating factors.

दूषणस्वभावाद् दोषा इति ।

AṣṭSaṅg 20.3

Because of their vitiating property they are known as *doṣa*.

Of the three *doṣas vāyu* has been given the prime importance because without its involvement and participation other constituents and *doṣas* are ineffective and static.

अचिन्त्यवीर्यो दोषाणां नेता रोगसमूहराट् ॥

SuSam NiSthā I.8cd

Vāyu is the leader of the *doṣas*, it has infinite power and is king of those causing disease.

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In the physiological context *vāyu* has been termed as →*prāṇa* or life itself. (*vāyuḥ prāṇaḥ*, CarSam ŚāSthā V.5)

सर्वा हि चेष्टा वातेन स प्राणः प्राणिनां स्मृतः ।

CarSam SūSthā XVII.118ab

All activity in the living beings is due to *vāta* and hence it is known as 'life' of the living beings.

Further coordination, organisation and facilitation of all body functions is dependent upon *vāyu*, as is brought out by several references.

दोषधात्वग्निसमतां सम्प्राप्तिं विषयेषु च ।
क्रियाणामानुलोम्यञ्च करोत्यकुपितोऽनिलः ॥

SuSam NiSthā I.10

The normal unvitiated *vāyu* maintains the equilibrium of *doṣa*, *dhātus* and *agni* and also helps in the perception of objects by their sensory organs and induces all systems of the body to funciton in their normal ways.

उत्साहोच्छ्वासनिःश्वासचेष्टा धातुगतिः समा ।
समो मोक्षो गतिमतां वायोः कर्माविकारजम् ॥

CarSam SūSthā XVIII.49

Enthusiasm, inspiration, expiration, all movements, normal processing of *dhātus*, normal excretion of excreta are the normal functions of *vāyu*.

Vāyu moving in its channels facilitates the normal functioning of the body and clarity of the intellectual faculty and performs other functions.

Caraka and Suśruta in the chapters specifically devoted to *vāta* and elsewhere have described the functions of *vāyu* in the phenomenal world as well as in the body in detail. In the phenomenal world *vāyu* has been compared to the cosmic energy, God, creator, and destroyer, etc. As the cosmic energy is responsible for creation, maintenance and dissolution of the phenomenal world from the celestial to the atomic level, *vāyu* in the body is responsible for all body activities.

प्रकृतिभूतस्य खल्वस्य लोके चरतः कर्माणीमानि भवन्ति; तद्यथा धरणी-धारणं, ज्वलनोज्ज्वालनम्, ... लोकानां, वायुरेव भगवानिति ॥

CarSam SūSthā XII.8

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वायुरायुर्बलं वायुर्वायुर्धाता शरीरिणाम् ।
वायुर्विश्वमिदं सर्वं प्रभुर्वायुश्च कीर्तितः ॥

CarSam CikSthā XXVIII.3

Vāyu if life, strength and sustainer of creatures. *Vāyu* is the entire world, it is the master (of all). (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

सर्वेषामेव सर्वात्मा सर्वलोकनमस्कृतः ॥
स्थित्युत्पत्तिविनाशेषु भूतानामेष कारणम् ।

SuSam NiSthā I.6cd–7ab

It is the soul of all living beings and is held in esteem everywhere. This is the cause of origin, existence and destruction of all living beings.

The above stanzas extolling the virtues of *vāyu* are based on its inherent temporal qualities of which '*gati*' – mobility, movement, and '*sparśa*' – sensation of touch are most important. In fact the derivation of the word *vāta* has been related as '*gati*' (*vā – gatigandhanayoriti*, SuSam SūSthā XXI.5).

अव्यक्तो व्यक्तकर्मा च रूक्षः शीतो लघुः खरः ॥
तिर्यग्गो द्विगुणश्चैव रजोबहुल एव च ।

SuSam NiSthā I.7cd–8ab

Unmanifest by itself, manifested by actions, *vāyu* is dry, cold, light and rough, has lateral movement, two attributes of touch and sound and has the predominance of *rajas*.

रूक्षः शीतो लघुः सूक्ष्मश्चलोऽथ विशदः खरः ।

CarSam SūSthā I.59ab

Vāyu is dry, cold, light, subtle, mobile, non-slimy and rough.

योगवाहः परं वायुः संयोगादुभयार्थकृत् ।
दाहकृत्तेजसा युक्तः शीतकृत् सोमसंश्रयात् ॥

CarSam CiSthā III.38

Vāyu can enhance or have properties according to its association. It can cause burning sensation with *pitta* and have cooling proportion in association with *śleśmā*.

The functions of *vāyu* has been further laborated in its various types according to their locations. Five types of *vāyu* have been described: *prāṇa, udāna, samāna, vyāna* and *apāna*.

प्राणोदानौ समानश्च व्यानश्चापान एव च ।
स्थानस्था मारुताः पञ्च यापयन्ति शरीरिणम् ॥

SuSam NiSthā I.12

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Vāyu of five types known as *praṇa, udāna, samāna, vyāna* and *apāna* located in different sites sustain the body.

Vāyu divided in five ways sustains the body by the actions of *praspandana* – pulsation, *udvahana* – bringing up, *pūraṇa* – filling, *viveka* – discrimination and *dhāraṇa* – retention.

Praspandana is the action of *vyāna vāyu* and it signifies circulation within the body of various metabolic products and nutrients.

Udvahana is the function of *udāna vāyu* and signifies all those actions in which upward movement is required as speech, singing, sneezing, expiration, hiccup etc.

Pūraṇa is the function of *prāṇa vāyu* which signifies those actions by which the body is filled up with the nutrients, intake of food or oxygen – respiration.

Viveka is the function of *samāna vāyu* and signifies digestion and separation of nutrients and excretory products in the gastro-initiates the retention of excretion products, foetus till they are to be expelled.

That *vāyu* which is diffused all over the body is *vyāna vāyu* and is constantly engaged in the transport of *rasa.* It helps in sweating and also in the flow of blood. Its movements are of five types: expansion, contraction, upwards, downwards and oblique. Upon being vitiated it often causes diseases which are generalized.

Due to its propulsive attribute, *vyāna vāyu* makes the nutrient fluid circulate through the whole body.

Thus in the physiological context *vāyu* is responsible for all movement in the body. Movement in this context incorporates voluntary muscular movement – locomotion, movement within the body, circulation of the body fluids, molecular movement represented by digestion and separation of the nutrients and excretion products, involuntary movements of respiration, blinking of the eyes, evacuation of excretory products, touch and cognition by sensory organs, and regulation of the body functions.

The qualities of *vāyu* are described as follows:

रूक्षः शीतो लघुः सूक्ष्मश्चलोऽथ विशदः खरः ।
विपरीतगुणैर्द्रव्यैर्मारुतः सम्प्रशाम्यति ॥

CarSam SūSthā I.59

Vāyu is rough, cold, light, subtle, mobile, nonslimy and coarse, and it is pacified by substances with opposite qualities. It is these attributes which manifest when *vāta* is deranged.

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Motion is one of the primary attributes of *vāyu*, hence all disorders related to motion are caused by *vāyu*. Controlled movement leading to normal functioning is the function of normal *vāyu*, whereas uncontrolled movement, difficulty in movement or loss of movement are caused by deranged *vāyu*.

Sensory Disturbances

Tactile sensation as also function of all sensory organs are controlled by *vāyu*. Its derangement causes disorders of sensation as pain, hypersthesia, anaesthesia and parasthesia. Severe colicky pain – *śūla*, pricking pain are the specific *vātic* type.

Diseases which are caused by the aggravation of *vāyu* exhibit the inherent attribute of *vāyu*, however they are given specific names according ot the site they involve and types of clinical disturbances they cause. The basic features of *vāyu* which are manifested are dryness, coldness, lightness, nonsliminess, mobility and unsteadiness.

रौक्ष्यं शैत्यं लाघवं वैशद्यं गतिरमूर्तत्वमनवस्थितत्वञ्चेति वायोरात्मरूपाणि ।

CarSam SūSthā XX.12

"Dryness, coldness, lightness, nonsliminess, mobility, vague, unsteadiness are the attributes of *vāyu*" which are exhibited in *vāta* diseases.

Further,

वातवृद्धौ वाक्पारुष्यं कार्श्यं काष्ण्यं गात्रस्फुरणम् उष्णकामिता निद्रानाशोऽल्पबलत्वं गाढवर्चस्त्वञ्च; ... ।

SuSam SūSthā XV.13

Due to aggravation of *vāta*, dryness of the skin, its atrophy blackness, tremors of the limbs, desire for warmth, loss of sleep, weakness and constipation occur.

Further, a group of disorders known as vātic diseases have been described in all classics of Āyurveda. They may be classified as follows:

1. Specific vātic disorders – known as *nanātmaja*. Caraka has described 80 in number.
2. Vātic disorders due to location of deranged *vāyu* at various organs and body tissues.

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3. Clinical manifestations caused by derangement of different types of *vāyu* as *prāṇa, apāna* etc.

4. Disorders caused by '*āvaraṇa*', masking of *vāyu* by any other *doṣa*

   [a.] *āvaraṇa* by each other type of *vāyu*

   [b.] *āvaraṇa* by other *doṣa*

   [c.] *āvaraṇa* by *dhātus.*

5. Vātic disorders associated with *āma* and without.

6. Diseases with predominant vātic involvement as *gulma, shūla.*

Vātic disorders have also been enumerated and named according to the site and organ involved.

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AGNI

Overview

Agni (m.) means fire and since fire is understood in the Vedas as a divine force, Agni is also god of fire. *Agni* partakes of both, the physical-elemental nature of fire and the metaphysical, hence he is the mediator *par excellence* between men and the gods, by means of the ritual fire. Right from the Ṛgvedic times to present-day Hinduism, no ritual action is complete without a fire sacrifice (*yajña, homa*). The sacraments (*saṃskāra*) marking the stages of human life cannot be performed without the sacred fire, upto the last stage of the funeral pyre (*antyeṣṭi*).

Agni is not only the power of heat and light in the cosmos, but also in the human body as a microcosm, where he is associated with the very life-breath (*prāṇa*), with speech (*vāc*), vision (*cakṣu*) and with the digestive fire (cf. Āyurveda).

Agni is on the earth what the Sun (*Sūrya*) is in the sky, hence they are often identified, or correlated, as in the frequently recited hymn of the **Yajur-Veda**: "Fire is Light, Light is Fire. Glory! Sun is Light, Light is Sun. Glory! Fire is Splendor, Light is Splendor. Glory!" (YV III.9, tr. R. Panikkar). *Agni* is much more than light (→*jyotis*) and heat (*tejas*), he is the very power of sacrifice, he is called the friend, the inspired poet (*kavi*), the priest (*hotṛ, purohita*), the pure and purifying one (*pāvaka*), and many other epithets are applied to him in the Veda. He is the messenger to the gods. He has three births, on earth, in midspace and in heaven, and his nature is often described as threefold. Hence it is said that, though being one, Agni is enkindled in many forms (*eka evāgnir bahudhā samiddha...*, ṚV VIII.58.2). His manifestations are many, external and internal.

The construction of fire-altars of different shapes (*vedi, kuṇḍa, agnicayana*) is the beginning of geometry and architecture in India, as described in the Śulba-Sūtras.

As one of the five elements, *agni* is said to originate from *vāyu* (wind) and to generate *ap* (water), according to the **Taittirīya Upaniṣad** (II.1), which has become the most widely accepted cosmology in the Darśanas. As an element his functions are burning, cooking or digesting and illuminating (*dahana-pacana-prakāśana-karma agneḥ*, MīmSūBh VII.4.9).

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Though in the Veda Agni does not possess anthropomorphic form, in later mythology and iconography he is represented anthropomorphically as one of the *dikpālas* or regent of the south-eastern direction.

Etymology and Related Words

The term *agni* is clearly Indo-European. Its cognates are common in other Indo-European languages and always mean 'fire': Latin *ignis*, Russian *ogon*, Lithuanian *ugnis*, etc.

The **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** connects the word *agni* with *agra*, foremost:

तद्वा एनमेतदग्रे देवानामजनयत-तस्मादग्निः । अग्रिर्ह वै नामैतद्-यदग्निरिति ।

ŚBr II.2.4.2, cf. ŚBr VI.1.1.11

He [Prajāpati] thus generated him first (*agre*) of the gods; and therefore (he is called) Agni, for *agni* (they say) is the same as *agri*.
(Tr. J. Eggeling)

That Agni was the first god to be created is found also in some other texts (e.g., TBr II.1.6.4).

Yāska explains *agni* as a combination of *agra* or *aṅga* and *nī*– 'to lead':

अग्निः कस्मात् । अग्रणीर्भवति । अग्रं यज्ञेषु प्रणीयते । अङ्गं नयति सन्नममानः ।

Nir VII.14

From what root is Agni derived? He is the foremost leader, he is led foremost in sacrifices, he makes everything, to which it inclines, a part of himself. (Tr. L.Sarup)

According to Śākapūṇi, Yāska adds, *agni* is derived from three roots, combining in itself *a* from *i*– 'to go', *g* from *añj*– 'to shine' or *dah*– 'to burn', and *ni* from *nī*– 'to lead'.

The **Bṛhaddevatā** follows the **Nirukta** when it says:

जातो यदग्रे भूतानामग्रणीरध्वरे च यत् ।
नाम्ना संनयते वाङ्गं स्तुतोऽग्निरिति सूरिभिः ॥

BṛDev II.24

Because he (Agni) was born at the beginning (*ag-re*) of beings, and

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he is a leader (*agra-ṇī*) at the sacrifice or (because) he unites (his) body (*aṅgam-saṃ-nī*) he is praised by sages under the name of Agni. (Tr. A.A. Macdonell)

A similar etymological connection of *agni* (as a name of the fire-god) with the root *nī-* 'to lead' is shown in the **Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā**:

अङ्गीकारं समीपं स्वमागतं निखिलं जगत् ।
नयत्यात्मानमित्येवमग्निशब्दो निरुच्यते ॥
स्वात्मोपसर्पिणं जीवं नेताग्निः स्वं परं पदम् ।
* * *
एवं स भगवानग्निर्जातवेदा हरिः स्वयम् ॥

AhSam LVII.44–45ab, 49cd

Agni is so called because he accepts and leads the whole world approaching him to himself. *Agni* leads the individual soul (*jīva*) approaching him to his supreme abode; and in this sense the Lord Jātavedas Agni is identical with Hari.

Though intended to explain the name of the fire-god, the first verse quoted above may hint at the characteristic of fire of assimilating everything and converting it into fire itself.

Grammarians derive the word *agni* from the root *ag–* 'to move' by adding the suffix *ni* (*aṅger nalopaś ca*, Uṇādi Sū 490). Kṣīrasvāmin, commenting on the **Amara Kośa** I.1.53, explains: "*aṅgati ūrdhvaṃ yāty agniḥ*". *Agni* is derived from the root *agi–* (to go) 'one that goes upwards'. His explanation accords with the most familiar meaning of *agni*, burning fire, with its flames rising upwards. This characteristic received attention both in the philosophical systems and in literature, e.g. *agner ūrdhvajvalanam* (VaiśSū V.2.13; *prasiddham ūrdhvajvalanaṃ havirbhujaḥ*, Śiśu I.2b).

Vaiśvānara ('belonging to all men'), *Jātavedas* ('omniscient') and *Draviṇodas* ('giver of wealth') are important synonyms of Agni. Vaiśvānara, usually an epithet of Agni, is sometimes distinguished from Agni (ŚBr I.5.1.15–16, TāṇḍMBr XXI.10.11, ĀśvaŚrSū I.3.23). The **Nighaṇṭu** counts it as one of the names of Agni. Yāska (Nir VII.23) records that according to ancient ritualists,Vaiśvānara is the sun, while he, after Śākapūṇi, identifies Vaiśvānara with the terrestrial fire.

The words *agni, tejas* and *jyotis* are sometimes used synonymously, e.g., in the context of the origin of the elements, all these three words are used to mean the fire element, *jyotis* in AitĀr II.6.1, ŚāṅkhĀr VII.22, MuṇḍUp II.1.3; *tejas* in ChUp VI.2.3., and *agni* in TUp II.1, etc.

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A large number of compounds are formed with *agni* as a constituent. Many of them are ritualistic terms connected with Agni, as shown below:

Names of sacrifices derived from *agni*, e.g., *agniṣṭoma*, the first of the seven types of Soma sacrifices, *agnihotra*, a compulsory daily rite, *agnyādheya/-agnyādhāna* 'installation of sacrificial fires', *agnicayana/agnicityā/agniciti* 'piling the fires', *agniṣṭut*, the name of an *ekāha* sacrifice.

Names of performers connected with *agni*, e.g., *agnicit* 'one who has performed *agnicayana*', *agnihotrin* 'one who performs *agnihotra*', *āhitāgni*, 'one who has installed the (sacred) fires', *agnīdh* 'one who kindles the fire', *āgnīdhra* (m.), the name of a priest, the name of a sacrificial fire (JaimBr I.358) which is also called *āgnīdhrīya*; and *āgnīdhra* (*n.*) is the place where this fire is kindled.

Other terms connected with ritual, e.g., *agniṣṭha*, the central stake (*yūpa*) nearest to the *Āhavanīya* in Aśvamedha, *agnyāgāra* 'the shed for the sacrificial fires', *agnipuccha* 'the extreme point of the fire altar', *agnimanthana* 'churning of fire by friction', *agnihotrī* (*f.*) 'cow yielding milk for *agnihotra*', and *agniṣṭoma*, name of a *sāman*. *Agnirahasya* is the name of the 10th book of the **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa**. *Agnikṣetra*, 'field of Agni' designates the area of the *mahāvedi*, 'Great Altar Space' where the *Agnicayana* altar will be constructed.

Agni is a constituent of several pairs of gods (*devatādvandvas*), e.g., *agnāpūṣan, agnā-marut, agnā-viṣṇu, agnī-ṣoma, agnī-varuṇa, indrāgnī*. In compounds like *prāṇāgni* and *yogāgni, agni* is used in metaphorical sense.

Āgneya (derived from *agni*) means what has Agni for its presiding deity, e.g., *aja, hiraṇya, hotṛ* etc. The term *jātavedasyā* is used to mean the Ṛgvedic verse *jātavedase sunavāma somam* etc. in the **Aitareya Brāhmaṇa** (IV.32, V.2, etc.). *Āgnimāruta* (fr. *agnā-marut*) is the name of a *śastra* to be recited by the *hotṛ* at the third pressing (*savana*) of a Soma sacrifice.

Agni has many synonyms in Sanskrit (some of them are epithets); most of them mean ordinary fire, some denote the functions of *agni*, such as *jvalana* 'burning', *dahana* 'burning'; *śikhin/ śikhāvat* 'having flame', *saptārcis* 'seven-flamed', *dhūmaketu* 'smoke-bannered', *sociṣkeśa* 'flame-haired', *bṛhadbhānu* 'shining brightly', *citrabhānu* 'having variegated lustre', *vibhāvasu* 'a treasure of splendour', *kṛpīṭayoni* 'wood-born', *āśrayāśa* 'consuming things in contact', *kṛṣṇavartman* 'whose way is black', *śukra* 'resplendent'. Some of the names are connected with Agni's role in the sacrifices, e.g. *vahni* 'bearer (of oblations)', *hutabhuj* and *hutāśana* 'eater of oblations', *havyavāhana* 'bearer of oblations', and *uṣarbudha* 'early awoken, i.e. kindled'. Fire, especially sacrificial fire, is regarded as pure and a great purifier, hence it is called *śuci* 'pure or radiant' and *pāvaka* 'purifier'. *Agni* is a friend of wind, both at physical and mythological

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levels, hence *vātasārathi*, *anilasārathi* and *vāyusakha* 'having wind as friend'. The fire-god is primarily meant by *jātavedas* 'knowing (or known by) all created things,' *rohitāśva* 'having red horses', and *hiraṇyaretas* 'golden seed.' *Agni* is *vaiśvānara* 'relating or belonging to all men' because of its universal use. The words *dava, dāva* and *vanahutāśana* mean forest fire. *Vāḍaba* means the submarine fire, which is, according to mythology, the fire of wrath of Aurva.

A large number of compounds are formed with *agni* as a constituent, such as: *agni-nakṣatra* 'the pleiadaes', *agni-parīkṣā* 'ordeal by fire', *agni-maṇi* 'the sun-stone', *agni-sakha* 'the wind', *agni-vārtta* 'having a livelihood by fire (e.g. a black-smith)', *agni-stambhana* '(magical) quenching of fire', etc.

In some compounds, *agni* or a synonym thereof is the last member, mostly used to denote fire in metaphoric sense, *agni*'s function of illuminating and burning being the basis of identification; e.g. *brahmāgni, jñānāgni, yogāgni, cidagni*, etc. Fire's destructive aspect is predominant in the identifications like *agni kravyāda, krodhāgni, kālāgni*, etc.

What has *Agni* for its presiding deity is called *āgneya* (derived from *agni* by adding the secondary suffix *eya* (*ḍhak*), Pā IV.2.33). "Dravyas predominant in properties of hot, sharp, minute, light, rough, non-slimy and vision are *āgneya* (constituted predominantly by *agni*). They produce heat, digestion, lustre, light and complexion." (CarSam SūSthā XXVI.11, tr. P.V. Sharma)

Layers of Meaning

The Vedic texts establish a synthesis of different layers of meanings with reference to the material world (*adhibhūta*), to the divine (*adhidaivata*), to ritual (*adhiyajña*) and to the self (*adhyātma*). This approach establishes their interrelationship and correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm. Thus *agni* is fire, the *hotṛ* priest, the fire-god, speech and *prāṇa*.

At the material level (*adhibhūta*) the meaning of *agni* is fire, e.g., in *agner vai dhūmo jāyate*, 'from fire rises smoke' (ŚBr V.3.5.17). In the ritual context *agni* means sacrificial fire(s), which are duly consecrated and hence regarded as very holy. At the divine (*adhidaiva*) level Agni is the name of the fire-god, the presiding deity of fire. Agni is also the presiding deity of speech. Within the body (*adhyātma*) *agni* functions as the digestive fire and speech.

Besides, the cosmic energy, the sum total of various forces in the universe, is sometimes called →*prāṇa* (Vol. I) 'vital force', sometimes *agni*, and sometimes also *āditya*:

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स एष वैश्वानरो विश्वरूपः प्राणोऽग्निरुदयते ।

PraUp I.7

That fire rises as the universal, all-formed life. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The vital airs in the body are also therefore viewed as fires; hence *prāṇāgnihotra.*

Agni means one of the five elements, the source of light and heat in different forms, having the properties of sound, form and touch. The fire element is subtle and gross; the latter form is generated through *pañcīkaraṇa*, a process of combination with other elements.

As an element, *agni* occupies the central position among the five elements; it is subtler than *kṣiti* (earth) and *jala* (water), while *vāyu* and *ākāśa* are subtler than *agni. Agni* abounds in attributes of *sattva* and *rajas* (SuSam ŚāSthā I.20).

In its visible form, *agni* appears as the sun in the sky, as lightning in atmosphere and as fire on the earth. In Indian thought, it is very difficult to draw a clear line of demarcation between matter and spirit, between the phenomenal world and the divine. There are only different levels in which the divine manifests itself. From a very early period, fire was regarded as a holy substance, and the Vedic seers found fire to be an abode of, and the best medium for the gods. The sacrificial fires were duly consecrated, and oblations were offered into them. Three such Vedic sacrificial fires, *āhavanīya, gārhapatya* and *dakṣiṇa*, are called *agnitraya* or *tretāgni* 'the triad of fires'. These fire altars have different shapes. One who has installed these fires is an *āhitāgni.*

The connection of the sacrificial fires with the number three is so famous that one of the secondary meanings of *agni* later came to be 'three' (in the context of indicating date, number etc.), e.g. the expression *vedakhāgniśarāḥ* therefore means 5304. Another secondary meaning of *agni*, exclusively connected with the Vedic ritual, is an altar raised by a special arrangement of bricks for fire, made for the *cayana* sacrifice (Pā III.1.131; 2.92).

At the *adhidaiva* level, Agni means the fire-god, the divine agent and mediator. This Agni is later given an anthropomorphic form, though the natural basis was never lost sight of. A whole mythology centres round this fire-god. "The history of religion practically includes only two genuine fire-gods – Agni in Hinduism, and Ātar of Zoroastrianism" (*'Fire', Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. VI).

In the Tantras, the essence, the very power of fire and the fire-god is symbolized by the seed-syllable or *bīja raṃ.* In the system of decoding the *mantras* (*mantroddhāra*), the word *agni* stands for the letter *r*, e.g. the expression *nakulīśo'gnim ārūḍhaḥ* (ŚāTil IX.2) would mean '*h*' and '*r*'.

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Figure 18: Agni: Sarnath, 7th Cent. A.D.

What is operating in the macrocosm, is operating also in the microcosm, the body. At the *adhyātma* level (within the body animated by *ātman*), *agni* functions as the power of vision and the motor organ of speech (*vāc*). As the digestive fire within the body, it digests the food and sustains life and energy of the organism.

In the process of progressive identification of everything with *brahman*, *agni* too is identified with the Supreme. Fire is concrete, but its brightness is abstract. *Agni*, especially its light form (*jyotis*), has been frequently used to describe transcendental entities, e.g. *kuṇḍalinī*, the individual soul and the Supreme Soul, etc. In its *jyotis* form, *agni* is an object of yogic contemplation. *Prakāśa* (illuminating) is one of the chief functions of *agni*.

Situated in the central position among the five elements and in the body, *agni* is the doorway as it were to the higher regions and levels of consciousness. The upward rising flames serve as a symbol of upward rising of the human mind, from gross to subtle, from subtle to transcendental. *Agni* is a symbol of divine splendour and spiritual illumination.

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Fire's functions of burning and illuminating have inspired many metaphorical uses of *agni* (e.g. *jñānāgni*). Fire consumes fuel, turns it into fire itself, and illuminates, thus dispelling darkness. Supreme knowledge consumes the result of action, destroys the ego of the knower and turns him into *brahman*, and illuminates, dispelling his ignorance (*avidyā*). The identification is based on *dahana* and *prakāśana*, the destructive aspect of fire combined with illumination. In Āgamas and Tantras, such identifications are frequently met with, e.g. *citivahni* (PrH 14) is explained as *citir eva viśvagrasanaśīlatvāt vahniḥ*, "Consciousness is (here likened to) fire because it devours (i.e. assimilates to itself) the (phenomenal) universe". (Tr. J. Singh)

Pacana or *pāka* (lit. cooking) is one of the functions of *agni*. Āyurveda deals with the digestive fire in the living bodies. But *pāka* as a function of *agni* is to be understood in a much broader sense: *yenāntar-vartinā sarvaṃ jagat pākam upaiti hi* (MPĀ vp XXI.3ab). By *pāka* we are to understand here all sorts of change effected by the impact of heat, of the sun or of fire in the microcosm and macrocosm, gestation and maturation of all plants and animal organisms, digestion of food, etc. The solar rays ripen vegetation, fire further cooks food, and food is digested by the digestive fire. By this process of *pāka*, *agni* matures the world and also thereby brings to completion – what is also said to be the function of →*kāla* (time). The **Mahābhārata** records that *kāla* is also called *agni* (XII.217.52).

The compound *agnīṣomau* 'Agni and Soma' conveys an important concept. Agni and Soma, the fiery and watery forces, are complementary, they are said to compose everything, *agnīṣomāv idaṃ sarvam* (MBh XII.277.33, cf. *agnīṣomātmakaṃ tasmāj jagat kṛtsnaṃ carācaram*, 'the whole world, movable or immovable, is therefore of the nature of agnī-ṣoma' MBh XII.328.52). The **Śiva Purāṇa** (VII.1.28.3,7–10) explains how *agni* and *soma*, as *Rudra* and *Śakti*, together maintain the universe.

Creation consists of two basic principles – the eater and the eaten, Agni and Soma, respectively:

> तयोरन्नाद एवान्यतरोऽभवत् । अन्नमन्यतरः । अन्नाद एवाग्निरभवत् । अन्नं सोमः । अन्नादश्च वा इदं सर्वमन्नं च ॥
>
> ŚBr XI.1.6.19
>
> One of them [Agni and Soma] became the eater of food, and the other became food: Agni became the eater of food, and Soma food; and the eater of food, and food, indeed, are everything here.
> (Tr. J. Eggeling)

The microcosm too is of the nature of *agnī-ṣoma, agnīṣomātmako dehaḥ*

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(ŚāTil I.39a); the right half represents the sun (or fire) and the left, the moon. The channels called *iḍā* and *piṅgalā* are of the nature of the moon and the sun respectively. Both of them merge in the middle channel called *suṣumnā*, and hence the middle channel (*nāḍī*) is of the nature of the combination of the two (ŚāTil I.41). The vital force moves along either *iḍā* or *piṅgalā*. If by means of yogic practice one can arrest this way of flowing, the vital force flows through the *suṣumnā*. With this, the coiled power called *kuṇḍalinī* rises upwards through the middle channel and spiritual realization follows, the ultimate being realization of perfect union or identity of *Śiva-Śakti*.

दक्षिणेतरसंचारनिरोधान्मध्यमाश्रितः ।
अग्नीषोमेन्धनो भावः प्रकाशयति मे पदम् ॥

LT XIV.29

My true state of existence, set alight by Agni and Soma, manifests itself as my abode (*padam*) in the middle (duct, i.e. *suṣumnā*), when passage through the right and left (ducts) is checked. (Tr. Sanjukta Gupta)

Development of the Concept

Agni: Early Vedic (Saṃhitās)

by **Frits Staal**

About 200 of the 1, 028 hymns of the **Ṛgveda** are addressed to Agni who in this respect comes second only to Indra. Even as a god, Agni is really disconnected from his element, fire. Agni is described as brilliant, golden, with flaming hair and beard, three or seven tongues, his face light, his eyes shining, his teeth sharp, making a cracking noise and leaving a black trail behind him. He was obviously an agent of deforestation in the Aryan expansion from West to East (which, at first, stayed North of the Ganges) and is accordingly described and feared as a burner of forests:

जिह्वाभिरह् नन्नमदर्चिषा जम्भणाभवन् । अग्निर्वनेषु रोचते ॥

ṚV VIII.43.8

Going up and down with his tongues, swaying to and fro with his flames, Agni burns in the forests.

But Agni is also the domestic fire that protects people:

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जनस्य गोपा अजनिष्ट जागृविरग्निः सुदक्षः सुविताय नव्यसे ।
घृतप्रतीको बृहता दिविस्पृशा द्युमद् वि भाति भरतेभ्यः शुचिः ॥

ṚV V.11.1

Guardian of the people, the vigilant, the clever; Agni was born for new prosperity. Face touched with butter, he shines bright with great sky-touching flame for all the Bharatas.

The divine Agni resides primarily in ritual. Oblations are made into the fire which is the ritual medium *par excellence*. As protector and overseer of ritual fire, Agni is the domestic priest:

अग्निमीळे पुरोहितं यज्ञस्य देवमृत्विजम् । होतारं रत्नधातमम् ॥

ṚV I.1.1

I invoke Agni, the domestic priest, god of the ritual and ministrant; the Hotṛ, distributor of wealth.

In the **Ṛgveda**, the Hotṛ makes the oblations and is not merely the invoker, as in the **Yajur-Veda** and later.

Agni is sage and poet:

अग्निः प्रत्नेन मन्मना शुम्भानस्तन्वं स्वाम् । कविर्विप्रेण वावृधे ॥

ṚV VIII.44.12

Agni who adorns his body with that ancient hymn, the poet is strengthened (with it) by the inspired singer.

Agni supports all endeavours, he assists priests, poets and warriors with their respective tasks and provides wealth for all because he is able as ritual intermediary to call up the other gods. Some of these ideas are expressed in a typical Ṛgvedic invocation of Agni:

प्र वो देवायाग्नये बर्हिष्ठमर्चास्मै ।
गमद् देवेभिरा स नो यजिष्ठो बर्हिरा सदत् ॥
ऋतावा यस्य रोदसी दक्षं सचन्त ऊतयः ।
हविष्मन्तस्तमीळते तं सनिष्यन्तोऽवसे ॥
स यन्ता विप्र एषां स यज्ञानामथा हि षः ।
अग्निं तं वो दुवस्यत दाता यो वनिता मघम् ॥
स नः शर्माणि वीतयेऽग्निर्यच्छतु शंतमा ।
यतो नः प्रुष्णवद् वसु दिवि क्षितिभ्यो अप्स्वा ॥
दीदिवांसमपुर्व्यं वस्वीभिरस्य धीतिभिः ।

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ऋञ्जाणो अग्निमिन्धते होतारं विश्पतिं विशाम् ॥
उत नो ब्रह्मन्नविष उक्थेषु देवहूतमः ।

ṚV III.13.1–6ab

I shall sing forth most exaltedly to this god Agni. He shall come here with the other gods. Superior ritualist, he shall sit on our sacrificial grass. He adheres to the truth, both worlds and the helpers (of the gods) follow his ability. (Priests) who offer oblations, (warriors) desirous of victory, call upon him for assistance. He the bard is leader of these (bards), indeed, leader of the ritual. Be friend this Agni of yours, who wins and bestows gifts. Let this Agni extend most beneficial refuge to this pursuit of ours, and then sprinkle upon our lands the goods found in heaven and in the waters. Along with their good poems for him, the singers kindle the ever-shining Agni as never before, him who is the Hotṛ and lord of all clans. Aid us in our invocation and hymn for you know best how to summon the gods.

Agni is not only fire on earth; he is also the celestial fire, which is the sun:

अचेत्यग्निश्चिकितुर्हव्यवाट् स सुमद्रथः ।
अग्निः शुक्रेण शोचिषा बृहत् सूरो अरोचत दिवि सूर्यो अरोचत ॥

ṚV VIII.56.5

Agni has appeared, knower of the way, ritual leader with his beautiful chariot. Agni shone with splendid radiation, the sun shone high, shone in the sky.

Agni occupies a central place in the universe. As a golden ornament, he shines between heaven and earth. At night he is more beautiful than during the day. He rises early, conquering darkness, and unfolds his power over heaven and earth with light and youthful vigor:

अग्निर्मूर्धा दिवः ककुत् पतिः पृथिव्या अयम् ।
अपां रेतांसि जिन्वति ॥

ṚV VIII.44.16

Agni is head and summit of heaven, and master of the earth. He invigorates the seeds of the waters.

There are numerous connections between Agni and water. This might surprise us but is due, at least in part, to the idea that Agni is born from the waters like the sun who rises out of the Eastern ocean and sets in the Western ocean.

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The links are twofold: on the one side, clouds and lightning and, on the other, plants and trees which grow with the help of water and produce the firewood from which Agni re-emerges. As male power, Agni also enters the female waters. Agni resides moreover in (flint) stones and in living beings who digest their food internally through Agni:

> अग्निर्भूम्यामोषधीष्वग्निमापो बिभ्रत्यग्निरश्मसु ।
> अग्निरन्तः पुरुषेषु गोष्वश्वेष्वग्नयः ॥
>
> AV XII.1.19
>
> Agni is in the earth, in plants; the waters hold Agni in them, in the stones is Agni.
> Agni abideth deep in men: Agnis abide in cows and steeds.
> (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

Agni is born in many places but his heavenly birth prevails: for originally he was brought from heaven, where he was hidden, by Mātariśvan, the Vedic Prometheus whose name is one of his secret names. Among Agni's earthly manifestations the most important are the waters and the kindling woods when they are rubbed together.

Agni is clever, wise and omniscient; as a seer, he is inspired and inspiring. He gives good advice, leads men, along with their thought and speech, in the right direction. As messenger between gods and men, he is 'common to all men' (*vaiśvānara*), a term often used in ritual contexts. This epithet suggests that Agni was discovered as the common element in the fire cults of the Vedic nomads and the pre-Vedic Indians whose meetings constituted one of the important events in the prehistory of India (Staal 1983, I: 162).

It is difficult to understand Agni without understanding the world view of the **Ṛgveda**. Among gods, Agni is especially close to Indra, though Indra is a warrior god and hero, a person with human-like qualities, whereas Agni always stays close to fire. More important is Agni's relation to Soma, an almost equally versatile universal power manifest as a god, a plant and the juice extracted from that plant. Agni and Soma are equally devoid of anthropomorphic traits, in this respect superior to the more customary gods of religion who are merely magnified replicas of humans. Agni and Soma do not merely reside in heaven or in the sky, from where they have to be brought or called down to earth. They are already here, concrete, visible, amenable to touch and taste, and present in the hands of men. Acccording to Bergaigne, followed by Renou, the entire Vedic mythology was reshaped and reorientated as a setting for Agni and Soma, and all the other divinities became counterparts or reflections of them (Renou 1953: 14). In Vedic ritual (which is largely distinct and independent from Vedic

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mythology), the basic substances are Agni and Soma, the ritual fire and the ceremonial drink. Other features of Vedic civilization are expressed in ritual through the mediation of Agni and Soma.

We have quoted once from the **Atharva-Veda** where Agni occupies a similar position as he does in the **Ṛgveda**. The descriptions of Agni in the **Atharva-Veda** are less rich than those of the **Ṛgveda**, but in the **Atharva-Veda** he has a few special features, e.g., he is invoked as a destroyer of evil spirits:

येऽमावास्यां रात्रिमुदस्थुर्व्राजमत्तृणः ।
अग्निस्तुरीयो यातुहा सो अस्मभ्यमधि ब्रवत् ॥

AV I.16.1

May potent Agni who destroys the demons bless and shelter us. From greedy friends who rise in troops at night-time when the moon is dark. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

In the **Atharva-Veda**, a healer invokes Agni in a charm against insanity:

इमं मे अग्ने पुरुषं मुमुग्ध्ययं यो बद्धः सुयतो लालपीति ।
अतोऽधि ते कृणवद् भागधेयं यदानुन्मदितोऽसति ॥
अग्निष्टे नि शमयतु यदि ते मन उद्युतम् ।
कृणोमि विद्वान्भेषजं यथानुन्मदितोऽससि ॥

AV VI.111.1–2

O Agni, for me, release this man who, bound and well-restrained, utters nonsense. Hence, he shall make an offering to you when he becomes sane.
If your mind is agitated, let Agni quieten it down for you. I, being skilled, prepare the medicine, so that you may become sane.
(Tr. K.G. Zysk)

About a third of the (**Taittirīya** or **Vājasaneyi**) **Saṃhitā** of the **Yajur-Veda** deals with a ritual called *agnicayana*, 'the piling of Agni', which is not referred to in the **Ṛgveda**. The fire rites that are mentioned in the **Ṛgveda** display features that are unmistakenly Indo-European, but their precise forms and proceedings are implicit and remain unclear. Most explicit are the Soma rites, described in Book IX, which also occur in the **Avesta** and represent an Indo-Iranian cult. In the **Yajur-Veda**, the rituals of Agni have become more explicit (almost entirely so in the Śrauta-Sūtras). The term 'Agni' in the **Yajur-Veda** denotes, in addition to its Ṛgvedic meanings, the *agnicayana* ritual and the bird-shaped altar that is characteristic of that ritual.

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The Yajurvedic *agnicayana* incorporates the Indo-European fire cult and the Indo-Iranian cult of Soma, but these features begin to be supplemented, complemented and overgrown by numerous Indian features that do not appear elsewhere. Some of these features point back to the Indian past. An example is provided by the bricks from which the altars are constructed or 'piled': they are similar in shape to Harappan bricks unearthed by archeologists and were also similarly kiln-fired. Other features point to the future, e.g., to what became later known as Hinduism.

At the beginning of the *agnicayana*, the *Ukhā* pot is made out of clay from 'Agni hidden in the mud':

वयँ स्याम सुमतौ पृथिव्या अग्निं खनिष्यन्त उपस्थे अस्याः ॥
* * *
ज्योतिष्मन्तं त्वाऽग्ने सुप्रतीकमजस्रेण भानुना दीद्यानम् ।
शिवं प्रजाभ्योऽहिंसन्तं पृथिव्याः सधस्थेऽग्निं
पुरीष्यमङ्गिरस्वत्खनामि ॥

TSam IV.1.2.4, IV.1.3.1

May we enjoy the blessings of earth
as we will be digging for Agni in her lap.

Agni! In the region of the earth,
in the fashion of the Aṅgirases
I dig you from the earth, full of light, of beautiful appearance,
shining with perpetual radiance,
benevolent and harmless to our offspring.

On the fourth day of the *agnicayana* performance, time is devoted to the foundation of the altar. A number of items are buried under it: bunches of grass; milk, ghee and curds; male and female pots; a lotus leaf, a tortoise, etc. Each of these is called '*Agni.*' The Adhvaryu priest sprinkles them with milk:

अग्नीन्वोऽग्निभ्यो जुष्टान्प्रोक्षामि ।

BŚrSū X.27.8–9

I sprinkle the lovable Agnis with Agnis.

The altar is subsequently 'piled' from 1000 bricks, after which the Yajamāna addresses Agni with a long recitation during which he repeatedly expresses his wish:

इमा मे अग्न इष्टका धेनवः सन्तु ।

TSam IV.4.11.4

Agni, may these bricks be cows for me!

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Several ceremonies invoking Agni are performed on the newly installed altar and chants for Agni are sung. The Adhvaryu addresses the Pratiprasthātṛ priest:

प्रतिप्रस्थातरिममग्निं कूर्मपृषन्तं कुरु ।

BŚrSū X.50.13

Pratiprasthātṛ! Make this Agni spotted like a tortoise!

After which the Pratiprasthātṛ sprinkles curds mixed with honey over the altar. Fire is then carried from the domestic to the new altar (*agnipraṇayana*):

प्राचीमनु प्रदिशं प्रेहि विद्वानग्नेरग्ने पुरो अग्निर्भवेह् ।
विश्वा आशा दीद्यानो वि भाह्यूर्जं नो धेहि द्विपदे चतुष्पदे ॥
क्रमध्वमग्निना नाकमुख्यँ हस्तेषु बिभ्रतः ।
दिवः पृष्ठँ सुवर्गत्वा मिश्रा देवेभिराध्वम् ॥

TSam IV.6.5.1

Advance East, o wise Agni, for Agni you be the Agni here!
Light up all regions with your radiance,
give strength to our two- and four-footed beings.
With Agni ascend the vault of heaven,
born of the Ukhā pot, lifting him in your hands!
Go to the ridge of heaven, paradise, and eat together with the gods!

Several oblations are then made for Agni. The last is for Agni Vaiśvānara.

After Soma has been carried forth, again with fire, the Soma ceremonies begin and take up several days and nights. This is followed by a whirlwind of other rites. On the twelfth and last day, before the concluding offering and final rites, the Yajamāna addresses Agni for the last time:

येऽग्नयः । पुरीष्याः प्रविष्टाः पृथिवीमनु ।
तेषां त्वमस्युत्तमः प्र णो जीवातवे सुव ॥
आपं त्वाऽग्ने मनसाऽऽपं त्वाऽग्ने तपसाऽऽपं त्वाऽग्ने दीक्षयाऽऽपं त्वाऽग्न उपसद्भिरापं त्वाऽग्ने सुत्ययाऽऽपं त्वाऽग्ने दक्षिणाभिरापं त्वाऽग्नेऽवभृथेनाऽऽपं त्वाऽग्ने वशयाऽऽपं त्वाऽग्ने स्वगाकारेण... ॥

TSam V.5.7.4–5

Fires of mud have entered the earth,
you are their highest, urge us to life!
I have obtained you, Agni, with my mind,
I have obtained you, Agni, with effort,
I have obtained you, Agni, with consecration,

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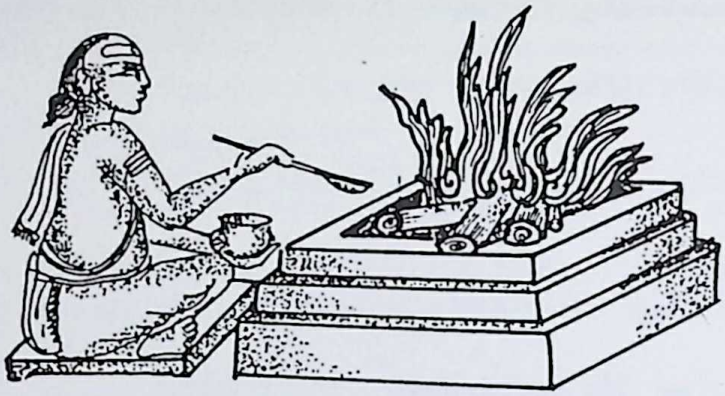

Figure 19: *Agnikuṇḍa* with sacred fire

I have obtained you, Agni, with days of observance,
I have obtained you, Agni, by a day of pressing,
I have obtained you, Agni, by sacrificial fee,
I have obtained you, Agni, by the final bath,
I have obtained you, Agni, by a barren cow,
I have obtained you, Agni, by shouting Svaga!

Agni: Late Vedic and Post-Vedic

by **S.C. Chakrabarti**

The concept of Agni as found in the Saṃhitās continues in later Vedic literature. Agni is the dispeller of sin and all evil forces like demons (*agnī rakṣāṃsi sedhati*, TBr II.4.1.6, cf. AitBr II.11; *pāpmano' pahantā*, ŚBr II.3.3.13; *jyotī rakṣohā*, ŚBr VII.4.1.34). Agni's domestic character is reflected in his being called lord of the household (*gṛhapati*); one pays reverence to him before going on a journey. He is friendly and fatherly, he knows everything, establishes connection between men and gods as a messenger, and bestows food, wealth, long life, etc. on his worshipper. The ritual literature obviously lays stress on the sacrificial, priestly and divine character of Agni. Agni is the most prominent element of a sacrifice; he is a priest, he bears the oblations and is himself a very important deity; Agni is indeed the sacrifice (*agnir vai yajñaḥ*, TāṇḍMBr XI.5.2).

Agni is sometimes hiding in the waters and plants. In the ritual *agnimanthana*, fire is generated from the fire sticks. As fire springs from the wood, the wood is regarded as its abode. Assuming the form of a horse, Agni entered into

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the Aśvattha tree (Ficus Religiosa) (TBr I.1.3.9). The Śamī tree is also related to fire. Hence the wood of the Aśvattha growing from within a Śamī tree is ideal for *araṇi* 'fire-sticks' (cf. TBr I.2.1.8, ĀśvaŚrSū II.1.16).

The natural character of fire is not obliterated; e.g., for showing that fire results in food, the **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** says:

अग्नेर्वै धूमो जायते, धूमादभ्रम्, अभ्राद्वृष्टिः । अग्नेर्वा एता जायन्ते ।

ŚBr V.3.5.17

From fire springs smoke, from smoke the cloud, from the cloud rain, – it is from fire that these are produced. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

But deification of Agni contributed to the tendency towards anthropomorphic presentation. Hence, seven tongues of Agni are spoken of (*sapta te agne samidhaḥ sapta jihvāḥ*, TBr III.11.5.1); their names are supplied by the **Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad**:

काली करली च मनोजवा च सुलोहिता या च सुधूम्रवर्णा ।
स्फुलिङ्गिनी विश्वरुची च देवी लेलायमाना इति सप्त जिह्वाः ॥

MuṇḍUp I.2.4

Kālī, Karālī, Manojavā, and Sulohitā and that which is Sudhūmravarṇā, as also Sphuliṅginī and the shining Viśvarucī – these are seven flaming tongues. (Tr. Gambhirananda)

The anthropomorphic character is clearer when Agni is said to ride, e.g., his steeds are red (*rohito hāgner aśvāḥ*, ŚBr VI.6.3.4).

Agni's role as the oblation bearer etc. is variously described in the Brāhmaṇas. The gods take the sacrificial food through the sacrificial fire, hence Agni is the mouth of the gods (TāṇḍMBr VI.1.6; ŚBr VII.1.2.4). Because Agni bears the oblation for the gods, he is also described as the beast of the gods (*agnir hi devānāṃ paśuḥ*, AitBr I.15).

There are three Agnis, we are told by the **Taittirīya Saṃhitā** (II.5.8.6), Havyavāhana, Kavyavāhana and Saharakṣas, the oblation bearer of the gods, of the *pitṛs*, and the guardian of the Asuras. The human sacrificer chooses Havyavāhana and Kavyavāhana for rites relating to the gods and the manes respectively. Agni is the *hotṛ* priest of the gods (*agnir vai devānāṃ hotā*, AitBr I.28, III.14; cf. ŚBr I.4.1.24, I.5.1.5), the human *hotṛ* priest is his counterpart.

Agni under different names and forms is the recipient of many sacrificial oblations as the deity of various principal and subsidiary offerings. He is said to

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Figure 20: Agni: Tanjore Art Gallery

have a share in all the oblations (*agniḥ sarveṣu haviḥṣu bhāgī bhavati*, ŚāṅkhBr III.4). Ritual literature distinguishes different Agnis according to epithets of Agni like *vratapati* 'lord of vows', *annapati* 'lord of food', *gṛhapati* 'lord of the house', *rakṣohan* 'killer of the Rakṣases', etc.

Agni is identified with all the gods (*agniḥ sarvā devatāḥ*, AitBr II.3, TBr I.4.4.10, ŚBr I.6.3.20, TĀr V.4.5). He is Rudra (*agnir vai rudraḥ*, ŚBr V.3.1.10, VI.1.3.10). The Rudras invoked in the Śatarudriya are said to be Agni (ŚBr IX.1.1.43); thus eight forms of Agni (=Rudra) are mentioned as Rudra, Sarva, Paśupati, Ugra, Aśani, Bhava, Mahān Deva and Īśāna (ŚBr VI.1.3.18).

Āryans are worshippers of light. Light and heat, the two characteristics of fire, symbolize wisdom (cf. *keto agniḥ, vijñātam agniḥ,* TĀr III.1.1) and vital force. Agni's brilliance is often mentioned and praised. Since illumination is a function of fire, Agni is the 'eye of both gods and men' (ŚBr IX.2.3.28), 'Agni is fiery spirit' (ŚBr V.2.3.8, V.3.5.8), Agni is the light of gods (*agnir devatānāṃ jyotiḥ*, JaimBr I.66). *Brahman* too is figuratively described as light or light of lights. Whatever reveals things may be viewed as light and the whole universe is indeed revealed by *Brahman.*

Among the gods and the Asuras originally, "Agni alone was immortal, and

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it was through him, the immortal, that they both lived ... The gods then established that (fire) in their immortal soul," (ŚBr II.2.2.8, 14, tr. J. Eggeling). The *agnicit* takes up Agni into his own self, when he is about to build the fire altar (ŚBr VII.4.1.1).

The threefold residence of Agni is a common subject. The three forms of fire – terrestrial, atmospheric and celestial – are distinguished, but they are also interrelated. Agni is identified with the wind and the sun (ŚBr X.4.5.1); he assumes three forms in the three regions. The three sacrificial fires, Āhavanīya, Dakṣiṇa (also called Anvāhāryapacana) and Gārhapatya, are respectively identified with the celestial, the atmospheric and the terrestrial regions (*athaiṣa devayonir devaloko yad āhavanīyaḥ,* JaimBr I.17; *dyaur āhavanīyaḥ,* ŚBr VIII.6.3.14, *antarikṣaṃ dakṣiṇāgniḥ*, MaitUp VI.34, *ayaṃ vai loko gārhapatyaḥ*, TĀr V.9.11, ŚBr VII.1.1.6, etc.).

Pavamāna, Pāvaka and Śuci (the deities of the three *pavamāneṣṭis*) are said to be three forms or bodies of Agni in this world, atmosphere and the celestial region respectively (ŚBr II.2.1.14; according to ŚāṅkhBr I.1, the forms are in the waters, the wind and the sun).

The three Agnis, Āhavanīya, Gārhapatya and Dakṣiṇa, are respectvely identified with the **Sāma-Veda**, the **Ṛgveda** and the **Yajur-Veda** (ṢaḍBr I.5.8–10). These identifications serve as the basis of ritual procedure too; e.g., as atonement for a fault relating to the **Ṛgveda**, the **Yajur-Veda** and the **Sāma-Veda** in course of a sacrifice, the expiation offering has to be offered in the Gārhapatya, the Dakṣiṇa and the Āhavanīya, respectively (AitBr V.32 etc.).

In course of explaining the origin of the *vyāhṛtis*, Prajāpati is said to have created this world from *prāṇa*, Agni from this world, the **Ṛgveda** from Agni and the mystic syllable *bhūḥ* from the **Ṛgveda** (AitBr V.32, ŚāṅkhBr VI.10, ŚBr XI.5.8). These objects are therefore interrelated and, by identification of cause and effect, often identified with one another. So this world is Agni (ŚBr I.9.2.13, XIV.9.1.14).

In another creation-myth Prajāpati is said to have created four groups of objects from four parts of his body. The things that were created from the same limb of Prajāpati are related to one another. Agni, *trivṛt stoma, gāyatrī* metre, *rathantara sāman,* brahmin, goat, and the season of spring were created from the mouth of Prajāpati (cf. TSam VII.1.1.4, TāṇḍMBr VI.1.3–6, JaimBr I.68). Since they were created from the mouth, they have prominence over those created from the other parts of his body.

Agni is said to be the presiding deity of these creations along with him and sometimes identified with them. Of the various *sāmans, rathantara* be-

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longs to Agni: *agnir vai rathantaram* (AitBr V.30, JaimBr I.335), *agnir eva rathantarasya [adhipatiḥ]* (JaimBr I.292), *agnir eṣa yad rathantaram* (JaimBr I.330, 332). Of the seven metres, *gāyatrī* belongs to Agni and Agni is identified with *gāyatrī*: *gāyatram agneś chandaḥ* (AitBr I.1, cf. ŚBr I.3.5.4, TāṇḍMBr VII.8.4.), *agnir hi gāyatrī* (JaimBr III.184,191; cf. ŚBr I.8.2.13,15). Similarly, of all the stomas, *trivṛt* is Agni: *agnir evaiṣa yat trivṛt stomaḥ* (JaimBr II.90).

What belongs to Agni, e.g., gold, goat, clarified butter, brahmin, *hotṛ*, the morning session of a Soma sacrifice, etc. are labelled *āgneya*: *āgneyaṃ vai hiraṇyam* (TBr II.2.5.2), *āgneyo vā ajaḥ* (ŚBr VI.4.4.15), *āgneyaṃ vai ghṛtam* (ŚBr VII.4.1.41, IX.2.2.3), *āgneyo brāhmaṇaḥ* (TāṇḍMBr XV.4.8, JaimBr I.182), *āgneyo hotā* (TāṇḍMBr XVIII.9.9, cf. TBr I.7.6.1, III.9.5.2). Of the three pressings in a Soma sacrifice, the morning pressing belongs to Agni (ŚāṅkhBr XII.6, XIV.5). The concept of Agni as a *dikpāla* 'guardian of the quarters' may be traced to the observation that Agni is the god of the eastern direction (*prācī hi dig agneḥ*, ŚBr VI.3.3.2, cf. TBr III.11.5.1, AV.III.27.1).

Vāc 'speech' and *prāṇa* 'vital force', two very important Vedic concepts, are both associated with Agni, for Agni is indeed *vāc* and *prāṇa*; it is asserted: *agnir vai vāk* (JaimBr II.54), *vāg evāgniḥ* (ŚBr III.2.2.13). Āditya, which is only a form of Agni, is *prāṇa* (AitBr V.31); Agni is *prāṇa* (JaimBr I.1.), *eṣa* [=Agni] *u vā imāḥ prajāḥ prāṇo bhūtvā bibharti* (ŚBr I.4.2.2), *te vā ete prāṇā eva yad agnayaḥ* [āhavanīya etc.] (ŚBr II.2.2.18).

Agnicayana 'piling of the fire', sometimes performed as a part of the Soma sacrifice, occupies a considerable portion of the **Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa** and the **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa**, where ritual details are combined with philosophical ideas. The main authority of the knowledge of fire is Śāṇḍilya. The altar is built by a large number of bricks having various names. It is often in the shape of a flying bird, probably symbolizing the sacrificer flying towards heaven. Fire is placed on the altar to the accompaniment of elaborate rites. *Agnicayana* is a highly praised ceremony, it is said to include all sacrifices. The fire altar is called Agni, indicating their identity. Prajāpati, the Cosmic Puruṣa (→*puruṣa*, Vol. I), is this very Agni (ŚBr VI.1.1.5, VI.2.1.23 etc.). Agni is thus raised to the status of the Creator God. Agni is Prajāpati's son and his father as well (ŚBr VI.1.2.26). Since Agni healed Prajāpati and entered into him, the latter is called Agni (ŚBr VI.1.2.21). Prajāpati is the year (ŚBr VI.1.2.18), he is identified also with the sun, which is one of the forms of Agni. Agni laid down on the altar is yonder sun (ŚBr VI.1.2.20). The immortal elements of the year, fire and man are the sun, Agni and *prāṇa*, respectively (ŚBr X.2.6.16–18). Agni is speech (ŚBr VI.1.2.28) and the fire-altar is also speech (ŚBr IX.1.2.17), *tasya vā etasyāgner vāg evopaniṣat* "The mystic import of this Fire-altar, doubtless, is

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Speech" (ŚBr X.5.1.1, tr. J. Eggeling). Agni is *prāṇa* 'vital force' (ŚBr X.3.3.6), so is also Prajāpati (ŚBr VI.3.1.9), and vital forces are represented in the layers of the fire altar (ŚBr X.1.4).

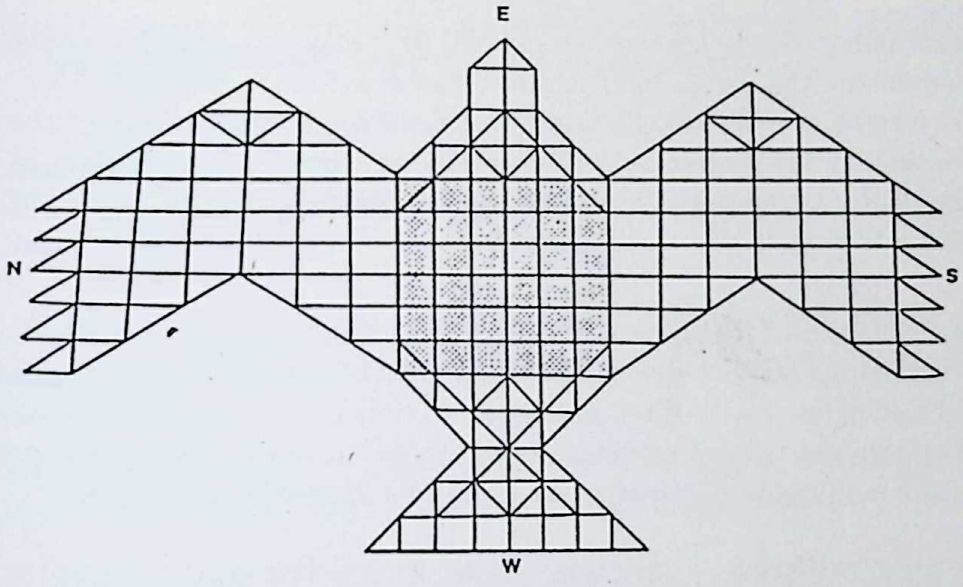

Figure 21: *Śyenaciti*: Bird-Shaped Fire Altar of the *agnicayana*

आत्मन्नग्निं गृह्णीते चेष्यन् । आत्मनो वाऽएतमधि जनयति । ... अथ यदात्मन्नग्निं गृहीत्वा चिनोति – तदग्नेरेवाध्यग्निं जनयति, अमृतादमृतम्, अपहतपाप्मनोऽपहतपाप्मानम् ॥

ŚBr VII.4.1.1

Being about to build Agni (the fire-altar), he [the sacrificer] takes him up into his own self; ... when he builds up Agni after taking him up into his own self, he causes Agni to be born from Agni, the immortal from the immortal, the sinless from the sinless.
(Tr. J. Eggeling)

The performer of *Agnicayana* becomes identified with Agni-Prajāpati and transcends death, attains immortality after separating from the body (ŚBr IX.4.4.8, X.4.3.9). The culmination of the *agnividyā* is propounded in **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** (X.6.3).

Agni is treated in the Brāhmaṇa as a door to Brahman.

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षड् ह वै ब्रह्मणो द्वारः । अग्निर्वायुरापश्चन्द्रमा विद्युदादित्यः ॥
स य उपदग्धेन हविषा यजते; अग्निना ह स ब्रह्मणो द्वारेण प्रतिपद्यते ।
सोऽग्निना ब्रह्मणो द्वारेण प्रतिपद्य ब्रह्मणः सायुज्यं सलोकतां जयति ॥

ŚBr XI.4.4.1–2

Now, indeed, there are six doors to the Brahman – to wit, fire, wind, the waters, the moon, lightning and the sun.
He who offers with slightly burnt sacrificial food, enters through the fire-door of the Brahman; and, by entering through the fire-door of the Brahman, he wins his union with, and participation in the world of the Brahman. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

The **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** (X.6.1) tells us that several brahmins went to Aśvapati Kaikeya for knowing the real nature of Vaiśvānara. It transpired in course of instruction by the king that they had only a partial view of Vaiśvānara; what they thought to be Vaiśvānara (namely, earth, water, ether, air, sun and heaven) are really only different parts of it. The king instructed them:

स एषोऽग्निर्वैश्वानरः – यत्पुरुषः । स यो हैतमेवमग्निं वैश्वानरं पुरुषविधं पुरुषेऽन्तः प्रतिष्ठितं वेद । अप पुनर्मृत्युं जयति । सर्वमायुरेति ।

ŚBr X.6.1.11

This Agni Vaiśvānara is no other than the Puruṣa; and verily, whosoever thus knows that Agni Vaiśvānara as Puruṣalike, as established within the Puruṣa, repels death, and attains all life. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

It is not the intention of the Brāhmaṇas that mere mechanical performance of rites is conducive to desired results. In fact, one should possess knowledge of the real significance of the rites. That is why we find exposition of symbolical or mystic meaning of the rites in the Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas.

Many Upaniṣadic ideas are found in the Brāhmaṇas in the making, especially the **Śatapatha** and **Jaiminīya**. The identification of fire, speech, earth, *hotṛ*, etc. has been frequently used in the Āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads for the sake of meditation, showing the hidden or symbolical significance of the sacrifices. The act of meditation merges the subject with the object of meditation through a gradual process of identification. One becomes what one meditates on.

In the context of the secret doctrine of combinations (*saṃhitā* → *sandhi* Vol.II), we are told that with reference to the lights, Agni is the first form (*pūrvarūpa*) and Āditya is the second, the waters are the union and lightning is the connection (TĀr VII.3.2). According to Sūryadatta, *agniḥ pūrvarūpaṃ*

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candramā uttararūpaṃ vidyut saṃhitā, "fire is the first form and the moon, the latter, lightning is the union" (ŚāṅkhĀr VII.6), with reference to the deities.

Fire (*jyotīṃṣi*) as one of the five elements (*mahābhūtas*) that constitute the creation is mentioned in the Āraṇyakas:

> पञ्चेमानि महाभूतानि भवन्तीति ह स्माऽऽह वालिशिखायनिः पृथिवी वायुराकाशमापो ज्योतींषि तानि मिथः संहितानि भवन्ति ।
>
> ŚāṅkhĀr VII.22
>
> There are, then, five gross elements,' says Vāliśikhāyani, 'the earth, wind, ether, water, light. These are united with each other. (Tr. A.B. Keith)

The **Praśna Upaniṣad** (IV.8) mentions both *tejas* and *tejomātrā*, which, in all probability, refer to the fire element and the rudiment of fire (cf. the later concept of *tanmātras*).

Red is indeed the colour of pure *tejas*, white, that of pure water, and black, that of pure earth (ChUp VI.4). After combining these elements:

> यदु रोहितमिवाभूदिति तेजसस्तद्रूपमिति तद्विदाञ्चक्रुः ।
>
> ChUp VI.4.6
>
> Again, what appeared as red that they knew was the colour of fire. (Tr. Gambhirananda)

The body is a combination of the five elements. In connection with meditation on the five elements in the human body it is said,

> स एष पुरुषः पञ्चविधस्तस्य यदुष्णं तज्ज्योतिः ।
>
> AitĀr II.3.3
>
> That man is fivefold. The heat in him is fire. (Tr. F. Max Müller)

Speech originated from the mouth of the *puruṣa* and from speech again emerged Agni (*mukhād vāg vāco'gniḥ*), who then, having become speech again, entered the mouth of the human body (*agnir vāg bhūtvā mukhaṃ prāviśat*, AitĀr II.4.1–2, cf. ŚāṅkhĀr XI.1–2). The **Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad** says that *prāṇa* led speech, smell etc. beyond the realm of death; speech then became Agni, who now continues to exist as a god (I.3.12).

Prajāpati created mind, speech, and vital force as food for himself. Any kind of sound is speech.

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तस्यै वाचः पृथिवी शरीरम् । ज्योतीरूपमयमग्निः । तद्यावत्येव वाक् तावती पृथिवी तावानयमग्निः ॥

BṛUp I.5.11

The earth is the body of that organ of speech, and this fire is its luminous organ. And as for as the organ of speech extends, so far extends the earth and so far does the fire. (Tr. Madhavananda)

One and the same thing may be viewed differently from different levels. There is a distinct tendency in the Āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads to arrive at a synthesis of these different levels. What is speech within the sacrificer (*adhyātma*) is the *hotṛ* priest with reference to sacrifice, and Agni, the deity. If the sacrificer looks upon them (the *hotṛ* and speech) as Agni, he is liberated from death. Aśvala asked Yājñavalkya, "since all this is overtaken by death, and swayed by it, by what means does the sacrificer go beyond the clutches of death?" Yājñavalkya replies:

होत्रर्त्विजाग्निना वाचा । वाग् वै यज्ञस्य होता । तद् येयं वाक् सोऽयमग्निः । स होता स मुक्तिः साऽतिमुक्तिः ॥

BṛUp III.1.3

Through the organ of speech – through fire, which is the (real) priest called Hotṛ. The sacrificer's organ of speech is the Hotṛ. This organ of speech is fire; this fire is the Hotṛ; the (fire) is liberation; this (liberation) is emancipation. (Tr. Madhavananda)

Food is assimilated in the body. The *tejas* part of our food becomes bones, marrow and speech:

तेजोऽशितं त्रेधा विधीयते । तस्य यः स्थविष्ठो धातुस्तदस्थि भवति । यो मध्यमः स मज्जा । योऽणिष्ठः सा वाक् ॥

ChUp VI.5.3

Fire when eaten becomes divided in three ways. Of it, that which is the grossest ingredient, that becomes bone. That which is the medium constituent, that becomes marrow. That which is the subtlest, that becomes (the organ of) speech. (Tr. Gambhirananda)

When one closes one's ears, one may hear a rumbling sound within, of burning fire as it were. If one ceases to hear this sound, one's death is imminent, says the **Aitareya Āraṇyaka** (III.2.4). Other omens include one's seeing fire as blue (cf. ŚāṅkhĀr VIII.7). Fire within the body as the digestive fire is called Vaiśvānara in the **Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad**:

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अयमग्निर्वैश्वानरो योऽयमन्तः पुरुषे । येनेदमन्नं पच्यते । यदिदमद्यते । तस्यैष घोषो भवति । यमेतत् कर्णावपिधाय शृणोति । स यदोत्क्रमिष्यन् भवति नैनं घोषँ शृणोति ॥

BṛUp V.9

The fire that is within a man and digests the food that is eaten, is Vaiśvānara. It emits this sound that one hears by stopping the ears thus. When a man is about to leave the body, he no more hears this sound. (Tr. Madhavananda)

The idea of *prāṇāgnihotra* is found in some texts (GoBr, ŚāṅkhĀr, ChUp). The external *agnihotra* is said to have its real significance in the internal *agnihotra*, where the food is offered to the fires of *prāṇa* within oneself. It is said in connection with the internal *agnihotra* relating to the self:

एता ह वै देवताः पुरुष एव प्रतिष्ठिता ... एतासु ह वै सर्वासु हुतं भवति य एवं विद्वानश्नाति च पिबति चाऽऽशयति च पाययति च ... ॥
तस्य प्राण एवाऽऽहवनीयोऽपानो गार्हपत्यो व्यानोऽन्वाहार्यपचनः ... ॥

ŚāṅkhĀr X.1,8

These deities, indeed, are established in man; ... In all of these is offering made by him who knowing this eats and drinks and makes to eat and drink. His expiration is the Āhavanīya (fire), his inspiration the Gārhapatya, his Vyāna the Anvāhāryapacana... (Tr. A.B. Keith)

We have referred to the knowledge of Vaiśvānara Agni (in ŚBr X.6.1). Another version of this is found in the **Chāndogya Upaniṣad** (V.11.18). Several brahmins went to Aśvapati Kaikeya for the knowledge of Vaiśvānara Ātman. The king told them that they had meditated on different aspects of Vaiśvānara Ātman, and so they had only a limited view.

एते वै खलु यूयं पृथगिवेममात्मानं वैश्वानरं विद्वाँसोऽन्नमत्थ । यस्त्वेतमेवं प्रादेशमात्रमभिविमानमात्मानं वैश्वानरमुपास्ते । स सर्वेषु लोकेषु सर्वेषु भूतेषु सर्वेष्वात्मस्वन्नमत्ति ॥
तस्य ह वा एतस्याऽऽत्मनो वैश्वानरस्य मूर्धैव सुतेजाश्चक्षुर्विश्वरूपः प्राणः पृथग्वर्त्माऽऽत्मा संदेहो बहुलो बस्तिरेव रयिः पृथिव्येव पादावुर एव वेदिर्लोमानि बर्हिर्हृदयं गार्हपत्यो मनोऽन्वाहार्यपचन आस्यमाहवनीयः ॥

ChUp V.18.1–2

But he who meditates on his Vaiśvānara-Self by identifying himself with a part of Him only, eats food in all the worlds, through all the creatures, through all the constituents of a person. Of that very Vaiśvānara-Self who is such, heaven indeed is the head, sun is

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the eye, air is the vital force, sky is the middle-part of the body, water is the bladder, earth indeed is the two feet, sacrificial altar is the chest, Kuśa-grass is the hair, Gārhapatya-fire is the heart, Anvāhāryapacana is the mind, Āhavanīya-fire is the mouth. (Tr. Gambhirananda)

The knower of Vaiśvānara is neither the deity nor the element of fire, but the Supreme Being, having three worlds for its body. He, who knowing this pervasive nature of Vaiśvānara, performs Agnihotra, has the oblations offered to the whole world. The knower of Vaiśvānara Ātman becomes the Self of all, so when he offers food to the fires of *prāṇa* (i.e. when he eats), the whole world is contented (ChUp V.19–24, cf. MaitUp VI.9). The **Prāṇāgnihotra Upaniṣad**, as the very name suggests, expounds the idea of *agnihotra* made in the *prāṇa*-fires.

The activities of an enlightened man, even his sleep constitute a sacrifice. His *prāṇas* or vital forces are viewed as the sacrificial fires. When one falls asleep, "It is the fires (i.e. the functions resembling fire) of *prāṇa* that really keep awake in the city of the body" (PraUp IV.3, tr. Gambhirananda)

In the Upaniṣads the Supreme Being is the highest reality. All the gods – including Agni – are subordinate to the Supreme Being, from whom they come into existence and by whom they are controlled. Fire does not shine in His presence (MuṇḍUp II.2.10). That Agni cannot burn even a blade of grass without His power has been demonstrated in the **Kena Upaniṣad** (III.4–6). Fire burns out of fear of this Supreme Being:

भयादस्याग्निस्तपति ... ।

KaṭhUp VI.3a

From fear of Him fire (Agni) doth burn. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

भीषाऽस्माद् वातः पवते भीषोदेति सूर्यः ।
भीषाऽस्मादग्निश्चेन्द्रश्च मृत्युर्धावति पञ्चमः ॥

TUp II.8

Through fear of Him the Wind (Vāyu) doth blow.
Through fear of Him the Sun (Sūrya) doth rise.
Through fear of Him both Agni (Fire) and Indra
And Death (Mṛtyu) as fifth do speed along. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The Self dwells in everything as *antaryāmin* 'the inner guide' as Yājñavalkya told Gautama:

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योऽग्नौ तिष्ठन्नग्नेरन्तरो यमग्निर्न वेद यस्याग्निः शरीरं योऽग्निमन्तरो यमयत्येष त आत्माऽन्तर्याम्यमृतः ॥

BṛUp III.7.5

He who inhabits fire, but is within it, whom fire does not know, whose body is fire, and who controls fire from within, is the Internal Ruler, your own immortal self. (Tr. Madhavananda)

The *ātmavidyā* of the Upaniṣads does not however reject the *agnividyā*. It preaches its fulfilment and transcendence. Reality is immanent as Agni or *prāṇa*, the cosmic energy, which is the universal principle behind all existence. The **Maitrāyaṇī Upaniṣad** says:

अनग्निहोत्र्यनग्निचिदज्ञानाभिध्यायिनां ब्रह्मणः पदव्योमानुस्मरणं विरुद्धम् । तस्मादग्निर्यष्टव्यश्चेतव्यः स्तोतव्योऽभिध्यातव्यः ॥

MaitUp VI.34

For those who do not perform the *agnihotra* sacrifice, who do not build up the fire, who are ignorant, who do not meditate, the remembering of the etherial (heavenly) place of *brahman* is obstructed. Therefore that fire should be worshipped with oblations, should be built (with bricks), is to be praised, is to be meditated upon. (Tr. S. Radhakrishnan)

In the **Kaṭha Upaniṣad** Yama imparts instruction about Nāciketa Agni as the second boon. He speaks of Agni that is *lokādi* 'the source of the world' and that is *svargya* 'conducive to heaven'. Through a combination of the rites and meditation the performer attains the state of *virāj*.

Space in the cavity of the heart is said to be the seat of *brahman*. It has five doors protected by gods. These door-keepers are helpful in reaching the inner space. The western opening is *apāna, vāc* and Agni (ChUp III.13.3).

Meditation on fire (*tejas*) as *brahman* and its results are mentioned in the **Chāndogya Upaniṣad**:

तेज उपास्स्वेति ॥ स यस्तेजो ब्रह्मेत्युपास्ते । तेजस्वी वै स तेजस्वतो लोकान् भास्वतोऽपहततमस्कानभिसिध्यति । यावत्तेजसो गतं तत्रास्य यथाकामचारो भवति यस्तेजो ब्रह्मेत्युपास्ते ।

ChUp VII.11.1–2

Meditate on fire. He who meditates on fire as Brahman surely becomes resplendent. He attains worlds that are resplendent, full of light and free from darkness. He who meditates on fire as Brahman

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gets freedom of movement as far as the range of fire extends.
(Tr. Gambhirananda)

In the *pañcāgnividyā*, meditation on five fires, the celestial world, cloud, this world, man, and woman are viewed as five fires (BṛUp VI.2.9ff., ChUp V.4–10). A rudimentary form of this *vidyā* is found already in the **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** (XI.6.2.6–10) and **Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa** (I.45).

For showing that everything emanates from the *ātman*, the Upaniṣads use the analogy of sparks; the sparks are essentially not different from fire.

यथाऽग्नेः क्षुद्रा विस्फुलिङ्गा व्युच्चरन्त्येवमेवास्मादात्मनः सर्वे प्राणाः सर्वे लोकाः सर्वे देवाः सर्वाणि भूतानि व्युच्चरन्ति ।

BṛUp II.1.20

As from a fire tiny sparks fly in all directions, so from this Self emanate all organs, all worlds, all gods and all beings.
(Tr. Madhavananda)

Similarly, for showing the all-pervasiveness of the *ātman*, the analogy of fire is invoked:

अग्निर्यथैको भुवनं प्रविष्टो रूपंरूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव ।
एकस्तथा सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा रूपंरूपं प्रतिरूपो बहिश्च ॥

KaṭhUp V.9

Just as fire, though one, having entered the world, assumes separate forms in respect of different shapes, similarly, the Self inside all beings, though one, assumes a form in respect of each shape; and (yet) it is outside. (Tr. Gambhirananda)

The idea of fire being concealed in the fire-sticks and being manifested by friction is brought to use for showing that *ātman*, though hidden, may be realized; "as fire in the friction-sticks, so is the Soul (Ātman) apprehended in one's own soul," (ŚvUp I.15, tr. R.E. Hume).

स्वदेहमरणिं कृत्वा प्रणवं चोत्तरारणिम् ।
ध्याननिर्मथनाभ्यासाद्देवं पश्येन्निगूढवत् ॥

ŚvUp I.14

By making one's body the lower friction stick and the syllable *aum* the upper friction stick, by practising the drill (or friction) of meditation one may see the God, hidden as it were. (Tr. S. Radhakrishnan)

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The sun in the sky, lightning in atmosphere and fire on this earth are matters of direct perception. It was however, realised that all these three were but only different forms of one and the same element, *agni* or *tejas*, in different regions. They are objects of adoration because of their divine essence.

एतद् भूतेषु लोकेषु अग्निभूतं स्थितं त्रिधा ।
ऋषयो गीर्भिरर्चन्ति व्यञ्जितं नामभिस्त्रिभिः ॥

BṛDev I.64

This (being) which in the form of fire, abides in three forms (*tridhā*) in the world that have come into being, the seers adore with songs as manifested under three names. (Tr. A.A. Macdonell)

According to **Bṛhaddevatā**, the terrestrial fire is *Pavamāna*, because it purifies this universe, the atmospheric fire is *Vanaspati*, also praised as *Jātavedas*; and the celestial fire is *Śuci*, praised also as *Vaiśvānara* (BṛDev I.66,II.29, 67).

The physical characteristics of fire were carefully observed. Different appearances of the flames were supposed to indicate different results, good and evil. When the appearance is pleasing and normal, it indicates good fortune. But when it is contrary, it forbodes the opposite result. Such omens and portents are mentioned in the **Atharva-Veda Pariśiṣṭa** and **Bṛhat Saṃhitā**. According to the **Bṛhat Saṃhitā** (XLIII.34-36), not only the colour, but also the sound and smell of the fire can indicate such results. If the sound emitted resembles that of a group of chariots, oceans, clouds, elephants or drums, it means great prosperity of a king. A similar result will be indicated when the fire smells like elephant's ichor, mud, lotus, fried grains, ghee or honey.

In Buddhism *agni* (*tejas*) is explained as the material element of fire (heat). This *agni-tejas* is also one of the four basic material qualities (*mahābhūtas*). *Tejas* as a designation of the element fire is abundantly documented, starting from Buddhist Pali scriptures:

"कतमा चावुसो, अज्झत्तिका तेजोधातु? यं अज्झत्तं पच्चत्तं तेजो तेजोगतं उपादिण्णं, सेय्यथिदं, येन च सन्तप्पति, येन च जरियति, येन च परिडय्हति, येन च असितपीतखायितसायितं सम्मा परिणामं गच्छति, यं वा पनञ्ञम्पि किञ्चि अज्झत्तं पच्चत्तं तेजो तेजोगतं उपादिण्णं, अयं वुच्चतावुसो, अज्झत्तिका तेजोधातू" ति च ।

ViMag XI.31

What is the internal fire element? whatever there is internally in oneself that is fire, fiery, clung to, that is to say, that whereby one is warmed, ages, and burns up, and whereby what is eaten, drunk, chewed and tasted gets completely digested, or whatever else there

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is internally in oneself that is fire, fiery, and clung to – this is called the internal fire element. (Tr. Bhikkhu Ñyāṇamoli)

In the **Dhammasaṅgaṇi** it is said:

कतमं तं रूपं तेजोधातु? यं तेजो तेजोगतं, उस्मा उस्मागतं, उसुमं उसुमागतं, अज्झत्तं वा, बहिद्धा वा उपादिण्णं वा, अनुपादिण्णं वा, इदं तं रूपं तेजोधातु।

DhSaṅ Rūpakaṇḍa p. 226

What is that form which is flame-element (or fire, light, heat etc.)? That which is flame, belonging to flame, heat, belonging to heat, hot, belonging to what is hot. Whether it be of the self, or external or the issue of grasping or not the issue of grasping. (Tr. Rhys Davids)

In Jainism *agni* or *tejas* like the other elements (*dravya*) is considered to be a living being with one sense-organ (*ekendriya*). It is immobile (*sthāvara*), but it is analysed under four divisions: *tejas, tejaskāya, tejaskāyika* and *tejojīva.* They cover all the aspects of the element, from gross to subtle (cf. Mūl 211 with Ācāravṛtti on 205). Several manifestations of fire are spoken of:

इंगाल जाल अच्ची मम्मुर सुद्धागणीय अगणी य ।
ते जाण तेउजीवा जाणित्ता परिहरेदव्वा ॥

Mūl 211

Smokeless charcoal fire, a flame, the flame of a lamp, fire of dried cow-dung, pure fire (the fire of lightining etc.) and the general fire. These should be known as living body of fire, therefore one should not injure them. (Tr. Sadananda)

Another aspect of fire is psychological:

त्रयोऽग्नयः समुद्दिष्टाः क्रोधकामोदराग्नयः ।
तेषु क्षमाविरागत्वानशनाहुतिभिर्वने ॥
स्थित्वर्षियतिमुन्यस्तशरणाः परमद्विजाः ।
इत्यात्मयज्ञमिष्टार्थामष्टमीमवनीं ययुः ॥

MPur LXVII.202–203

There are three types of fires such as fire of anger, *krodhāgni*, fire of passion, *kāmāgni*, and the digestive fire of the stomach, *udarāgni*, thus it is said. By giving offerings of forgiveness, detachment and fasting, the sages, the ascetics, the holy men and the best among the twice-born destitute of refuge, living in the forest by sacrificing themselves, obtain the eighth world, i.e., liberation. (Tr. Sadananda)

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Jainism does not consider fire to be sacred by itself, unless it is purified by worshipping the Arhats:

न स्वतोऽग्नेः पवित्रत्वं देवतारूपमेव वा ।
किन्त्वर्हद्दिव्यमूर्तीज्यासंबन्धात् पावनोऽनलः ॥

MPur XL.88

Fire itself does not have purification and divine quality. On account of the association with the *ijyā* worship of the divine image of Arhat, fire becomes purified. (Tr. Sadananda)

Further, the sacred fire is described thus:

स्फुलिङ्गपिङ्गलं भीममूर्ध्वज्वालाशतार्चिनम् ।
त्रिकोणं स्वस्तिकोपेतं तद्बीजं वह्निमण्डलम् ॥
* * *
बालार्कसन्निभश्चोर्ध्वं सावर्त्तश्चतुरङ्गुलः ।
अत्युष्णो ज्वलनाभिख्यः पवनः कीर्तितो बुधैः ॥

Jñān XXIX.22,27

Tawny like sparks of fire, tremendous, having thousands of uprising flames, a triangle with a *svastika* mark, decorated with *vahnibīja* thus is described the circle of fire (*vahni-maṇḍala*), which is reddish like the rising sun and goes upwards, moves with circles and comes out four *aṅgulas* and is warm. Thus the purifying element is called fire-circle (*vahni-maṇḍala*) by the sages. (Tr. Sadananda)

The form of fire is said to be triangular, just as in Tāntric symbolism:

अग्गि तिकोणो रत्तो ... ॥
अग्निः त्रिकोणः रक्तः ... ॥

ṆāSā 57

Fire is triangular and red. ...

The three Vedic sacrificial fires – *gārhapatya, dakṣiṇa* and *āhavanīya*, are identified in the **Mahābhārata** with the father, the mother and the preceptor, respectively:

पिता ह्यग्निर्गार्हपत्यो माताग्निर्दक्षिणः स्मृतः ।
गुरुराहवनीयस्तु साग्नित्रेता गरीयसी ॥

MBh XII.109.7 (almost identical, Manu II.231)

The father is said to be the *gārhapatya* fire; the mother, *dakṣiṇa* fire;

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and the preceptor is *āhavanīya* fire (the fire upon which libations are poured). These three fires are, of course, the greatest.
(Tr. M.N. Dutt)

What is fire at the physical (*adhibhūta*) level, is called the sun (a form of *agni*) at the divine (*adhidaiva*) level and the power of vision and speech at the individual (*adhyātma*) level (MBh XIV.42.29,37). It was realised that *agni*, though not in a visible form, resides within the bodies and other things like wood, especially the *śamī* wood (*tataḥ prabhṛti cāpy agniḥ śamīgarbheṣu dṛśyate*, MBh XIII.84.43).

The individual soul (*jīva*) is described in the **Mahābhārata** as *mānaso'gniḥ* (MBh XII.180.30). For describing how *ātman* shines as it is revealed, the **Mahābhārata** uses the analogy of all the three forms of *agni*, smokeless blazing fire, the shining sun and lightning:

विधूम इव दीप्तार्चिरादित्य इव दीप्तिमान् ।
वैद्युतोऽग्निरिवाकाशे पश्यत्यात्मानमात्मना । ...

MBh XII.232.18

Like a blazing smokeless fire, like the shining sun, and like lightning in space, one sees the Self by oneself.

Agni is proclaimed to be all the gods (MBh XIII.85.20). What more,

आदिनाथश्च लोकस्य तत्परं ब्रह्म तद्ध्रुवम् ।
सर्वकामदमित्याहुः ... ॥

MBh XIII.85.24

The first Creator of the universe declared Agni to be Supreme Brahma and Eternal, and the giver of all desires. (Tr.M.N. Dutt)

We are told that there was one original fire and that Aila Purūravas divided it into three (BrahmāṇḍaPur II.3.66.19). In the great Epics and Purāṇas *agni* is presented anthropomorphically. Various Agnis are named and their functions and geneology are also described in detail, often with the help of narratives. As regards the details, however, there is divergence in the Purāṇic traditions. Agni is often identified with Rudra, his wife is called Svāhā; his three sons are Pavamāna, Pāvaka and Śuci (identified with terrestrial, atmospheric and celestial fires, KūrPur I.13.15–16, DPur 46.32–33, etc.), who again have 45 sons in total. The essential unity of fire was however, not lost sight of (ViPur V.1.44). Agni's anthropomorphic form is described (e.g. in MatPur CCLXI.9–12), a terrible form of Agni, personified, is also portrayed (BhāgPur X.67.32–34). As

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a *dikpāla*, Agni protects the south-east quarter (*āgneyī diś*), his city is named Tejovatī (DBhāgPur VIII.7.10–11), and gold is his seed. Purity of gold is tested through fire (*hemnaḥ saṃlakṣyate hy agnau viśuddhiḥ śyāmikāpi vā*, Ragh I.10).

Agni is *jātavedas*, he knows all the beings. The Smṛtis depend on Agni's divine wisdom when they prescribe ordeal by fire, through which an accused person may prove his innocence if he is not harmed by fire in the process (Manu IX.115). It may be remembered in this connection that Sītā established her chastity by entering fire and then coming out unhurt (Rām, Yuddhakāṇḍa 118.1–4). A dead body is consigned to the flames of fire, with the hope that *agni* will lead the departed soul to the heavenly abode. A departing soul with knowledge of *brahman* takes to the path of flame (*devayāna* or *arcirmārga*) that starts with the abode of *agni* (BhG VIII.24).

The destructive aspect of fire may be found recorded in the episode of the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest in the **Mahābhārata**. Fire from Śiva's eye consumed Kāma (Rām I.23.12). *Krodhāgni*, the fire of wrath of Aurva, was thrown into the ocean, and taking the form of a horse-head, is still there (MBh I.171.18–22) and will destroy the world. *Kālāgni* or *Kālānala* is called the terrible fire that will consume the world at the end of the aeon, i.e. the fire of dissolution. A semblance of this was found by Arjuna in the mouths of the cosmic form of Kṛṣṇa (BhG XI.25).

The **Bhagavad-Gītā** counts fire among the eightfold division of the (*aparā*) *prakṛti* of Kṛṣṇa (VII.4). Kṛṣṇa declares Himself to be brilliance in fire (VII.9), to be *Pāvaka* (fire) among the eight Vasus (X.23). To Arjuna, the universal form of Kṛṣṇa was *dīptānalārkadyuti* 'having resplendence of the blazing fire and the sun' (XI.17), and to Sañjaya, it was comparable to thousand suns shining simultaneously in the sky (XI.12). Kṛṣṇa proclaims:

यदादित्यगतं तेजो जगद्भासयतेऽखिलम् ।
यच्चन्द्रमसि यच्चाग्नौ तत्तेजो विद्धि मामकम् ॥

BhG XV.12

That light in the sun which illumines the whole world, that which is in the moon, and that which is in fire, – know that light to be Mine. (Tr. Gambhirananda)

It is He again, who, as the digestive fire within the living organisms, digests the food (BhG XV.14).

In the **Bhagavad-Gītā** we come across some metaphorical uses of *agni*; *jñānāgni, brahmāgni, saṃyamāgni, indriyāgni*, and *yogāgni*. There are different levels of understanding the *yajña*, we are instructed. For one who has

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known *brahman, brahman* itself is the oblation (*brahmahavis*) and also the fire (*brahmāgni*), for the knowledge of *brahman* burns away the distinction between the two (BhG IV.24). For such a person *brahman* alone exists. A yogin on the other hand offers the activities of the senses and those of the vital air into the fire of yoga or self-control, lighted by knowledge (BhG IV.27).

यथैधांसि समिद्धोऽग्निर्भस्मसात् कुरुतेऽर्जुन ।
ज्ञानाग्निः सर्वकर्माणि भस्मसात् कुरुते तथा ॥

BhG IV.37

O Arjuna, as a blazing fire reduces pieces of wood to ashes, similarly the fire of Knowledge reduces all actions to ashes. (Tr. Gambhirananda)

Śaṅkarācārya comments in this connection that the fire of knowledge itself cannot literally reduce actions to ashes, so what is meant is that knowledge renders actions ineffective. The one whose actions have thus been burnt away by the fire of knowledge, is called learned (BhG IV.19). Seeing action in inaction and inaction in action is *jñāna* 'knowledge', which is a fire that burns away all good and evil actions.

Almost taking up the words of Kṛṣṇa (BhG XIV.14), the **Suśruta Saṃhitā** admits the divine character of the bodily fire:

जाठरो भगवानग्निरीश्वरोऽन्नस्य पाचकः ।
सौक्ष्म्याद्रसानाददानो विवेक्तुं नैव शक्यते ॥

SuSam SūSthā XXXV.27

The fire, that burns within a person, is godly in its subtle essence, and possesses the divine attributes ...and is the digestant of food. It takes up the lymph chyle of different tastes for the purpose of digestion, and is invisible owing to its extremely subtle essence. (Tr. K.L. Bhisagratna)

But since Āyurveda is primarily concerned with the body and health, the physiological aspects of *agni* have received detailed attention in this branch of learning. The gross body is a combination of the five elements and an abode of consciousness. The functions of *agni* in the macrocosm are also found within the body. The **Caraka Saṃhitā** says: 'Those derived (by the body) from *tejas* are complexion, the visual organ, light, digestion and heat' (ŚāSthā, IV.12).

Agni contributes to life and health of the body:

आयुर्वर्णो बलं स्वास्थ्यमुत्साहोपचयौ प्रभा ।
ओजस्तेजोऽग्नयः प्राणाश्चोक्ता देहाग्निहेतुकाः ॥

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शान्तेऽग्नौ म्रियते, युक्ते चिरं जीवत्यनामयः ।
रोगी स्याद्विकृते, मूलमग्निस्तस्मान्निरुच्यते ॥

CarSam CiSthā XV.3–4

Life-Span, complexion, strength, health, enthusiasm, corpulence, lustre, immunity, energy, heat processes and vital breath – all these depend on body-fire. One dies if this fire is extinguished, lives long free from disorders if it is functioning properly, gets ill if it is deranged, hence *Agni* (digestive fire) is the root cause of all. (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

Fire exists within the body in the form of *pitta*. The **Suśruta Saṃhitā** discusses in details how this fire discharges various functions in the body and hence is called by different names of *pācakāgni, rañjakāgni, sādhakāgni, ālocakāgni* and *bhrājakāgni* (SuSam SūSthā XXI.10). It may be noted however that all these functions mentioned above ultimately depend on the digestive fire. The intensity of the digestive fire is examined, which may be fourfold: regular, irregular, intense and mild.

The Vaiśeṣika system maintains that igneous bodies are asexually produced, they exist in the world of Āditya and are capable of experiencing the results of action. Bodies of light are admitted also in the **Tantravārttika**, a famous work of the Mīmāṃsā system. Kumārila says that:

स्वर्लोके तैजसप्राया देहाः शुद्धप्रभान्विताः ।
आप्यायन्ते विकीर्णेन भानवीयेन तेजसा ॥
तथा च मनुनाऽपि स्वर्गं लोकं गच्छन्नभिहितः, तेजोमूर्तिः ... ।

Tantravārttika on MīmSū III.1.13

In the Heavenly Regions, there are bodies of light, effulgent and glorious, which become added to by-and-by, by the rays emitted from the sun;...and Manu also speaks of people proceeding to Heaven in a body of light. (Tr. G.N. Jha)

In Āgama too, Agni's city, *tejovatī*, is said to be inhabited by beings who resemble Agni (MṛgĀ vp XIII.48).

We may now turn to Yoga for inner light (→*jyotis*). Metaphorically, yoga is itself called *yogāgni*, fire of yoga: *yogāgnir dahate kṣipram aśeṣaṃ pāpapañjaram*, 'the fire of yoga quickly burns all the cages of sin' (KūrPur II.11.2). As a result of following the yogic practices one realises one's real effulgent nature. In external worship, the mind is concentrated on the deity of worship, while in Yoga, it is concentrated on the *jyotis* form. Through a symbol, a concrete image of the abstract, one attempts to grasp the thing signified. The **Kūrma Purāṇa** gives

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a few examples of what to meditate upon; e.g. the mind may be fixed in the heart on the flame of one's individual soul; within that is another effulgent light, the light of the Supreme. One is to realise the identity of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul:

चिन्तयेत् तत्र विमलं परं ज्योतिर्यदक्षरम् ।
तस्मिन् ज्योतिषि विन्यस्य स्वात्मानं तदभेदतः ॥

KūrPur II.11.58

There one should meditate on the pure, supreme, imperishable Light. Fixing one's mind within that Light, one realizes one's Self without distinction.

In Patañjali's **Yoga-Sūtra**, similar practices are advised; e.g. meditation on the effulgent light in the lotus of the heart (I.36), and the results of such meditations are also mentioned (YSū III.26,33).

The Tantras and Āgamas contain many references to *agni* in its various meanings, relating to all the three levels, gross, subtle and transcendent. The single element, *tejas*, appears as the sun in the sky and as fire on the earth.

संविभज्यैकमेवात्र विधात्रा तद् द्विधा कृतम् ॥
स्थितये त्वग्निभावेन तथालोकाय भास्करः ।

MPĀ vp XXI.13cd–14ab

Dividing one single entity (that is, fire), the Lord made it two. For the maintenance of the world, He created fire and for illuminating the (whole) world the sun was made. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

Agni contributes to the maintenance of the world by means of its three principal functions, burning, illumining and cooking or digesting (*dahanāloka-paktibhiḥ*, *ibid.* XXI.5b). Gods, residing in the sacrificial fire, receive oblations. The sacrificial fire itself is conceived as having limbs like a person and the blazing flame is its tongue, where the oblations should be offered (ŚāTil V.154–155). In the Tāntric form of *homa*, burning fire is conceived as semen and the fire-pit (*kuṇḍa*) as the genital organ of *Śakti* called Vāgīśvarī. The performer, conceiving himself as Bhairava, unites the fire with consciousness and places it in the pit.

अग्निं तु शुक्रवद् ध्यात्वा चैतन्यं प्रणवेन तु ।
आत्मानं भैरवं ध्यात्वा अग्निं ध्यात्वा तु बीजवत् ।
ध्रुवेण कुण्डबाह्ये तु त्रिधा भ्राम्यावतारयेत् ॥

SvT II.198ab–199, cf. RauĀ kp XV.5

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Figure 22: Bhairava with *agnikeśa* (hair in the form of flames): Madras Museum

> The fire is to be meditated upon as semen, but consciousness by uttering *praṇava*. The (*ācārya*) who conceives himself as Bhairava should meditate on fire as the seed. Encircling the sacrificial pit thrice with the *dhruva*, he should bring it down (into the pit).

The sacrificial fire is not considered inert, for *jñānaśaktisvarūpaṃ tu vahniṃ tatropakalpayet*, 'Fire with the characteristic of knowledge as energy/power should be conceived there (in the fire pit)' (NT III.48ab, tr. H.N. Chakravarty); and the fire pit is conceived as *kriyāśakti* (NT III.70).

Agni symbolizes the *jñānaśakti*, one of the three powers, *jñāna, icchā* and *kriyā*, which are portrayed as the three eyes of Śiva (NT I.29–30). Agni is hence an eye of Śiva.

Abhinavagupta says in his **Tantrāloka**:

> योऽयं वह्नेः परं तत्त्वं प्रमातुरिदमेव तत् ।
>
> TĀl III.123ab
>
> What is the highest truth of fire is non-different from that of the knowing subject. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

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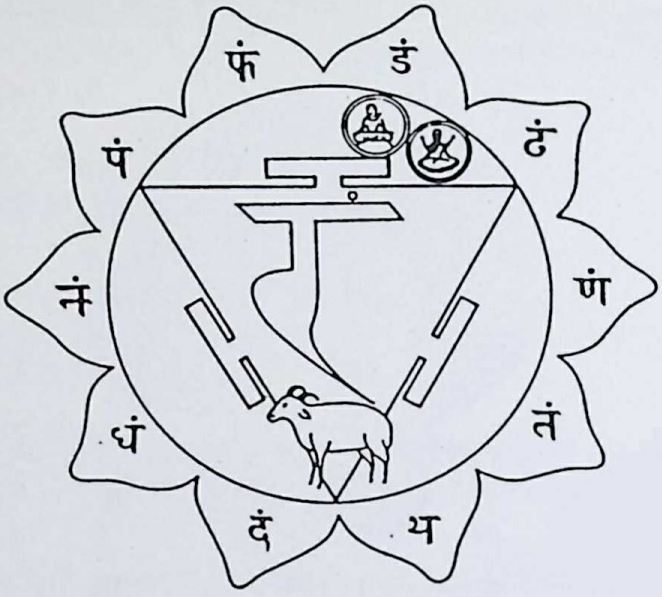

Figure 23: *Maṇipūra cakra: ra-bīja* for fire

स च प्रमाणप्रमेयविभागात्मनो भेदस्य दाहकत्वात् ज्वलनप्रधाना चिद् रूपं यस्य सः ... वह्नेरप्येवमिति तस्य प्रमातृत्वम्, ... ॥

Comm. on TĀl III.122

The fire consumes the distinction of the instrument of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) and the object of knowledge (*prameya*) and shines as the knowing subject.

In the Tantras, various colours and geometrical figures are assigned to the *tattvas*; thus *agni* is described as red (*rakto'gniḥ*, ŚāTil I.12) and his diagram is triangular (*trikoṇaṃ svastikopetaṃ vahner ardhendusaṃyutam*, *ibid.* I.23). The *bīja*s (seed letters → *bīja*), *varṇarūpas*, of the deities embody the very power of the deities. When expressed in gross sound, i.e. the *vaikharī* stage of sound, *raṃ* is the *bīja* of Agni.

The Yogic concept of *cakra*s (→*cakra*, Vol. II) or psychic centres (conceived as lotuses) in the human body is used also in the Tāntric system of contemplation. Each *cakra* has a characteristic colour, deity and *bīja*. Though the bodies are made of five elements, each of them has a particular area of predominance in the body. Agni predominates in the region close to the navel, the centre of the microcosm. The third *cakra* from below, *maṇipūra cakra*, as it is called, signifies fire. It is described in the **Śrītattvacintāmaṇi** as follows:

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तस्योर्ध्वे नाभिमूले दशदललसिते पूर्णमेघप्रकाशे
नीलाम्भोजप्रकाशैरुपहितजठरे डादि-फान्तैः सचन्द्रैः ।
ध्यायेद्वैश्वानरस्यारुणमिहिरसमं मण्डलं तत् त्रिकोणं
तद्बाह्ये स्वस्तिकाख्यैस्त्रिभिरभिलसितं तत्र वह्नेः स्वबीजम् ॥

ŚTaCi VI.20

Above it, and at the root of the navel, is the shining Lotus of ten petals, of the colour of heavy-laden rain clouds. Within it are the letters *ḍ* to *ph*, of the colour of the blue lotus with the nāda and bindu above them. Meditate there on the region of fire, triangular in form and shining like a rising sun. Outside it are three svastika marks, and within, the Bīja of Vahni himself. (Tr. A. Avalon)

The *bindu* (which is in fact Supreme Śakti) (→*bindu*, Vol. II) assumes a threefold aspect, three *bindu*s as it were, *bindu*, *nāda* and *bīja*, of which *bindu* has the nature of Śiva, *bīja* has that of Śakti, and *nāda* that of both. In technical terminology of the Tantras, they are designated fire, moon and sun, representing the operation of the three powers of knowledge, will and action (*jñāna, icchā* and *kriyā śaktis*) (ŚāTil I.8–11). These three *bindu*s or points form symbolically a triangle known as *kāmakalā*, the 'Triangle of Divine Desire' representing their collectivity.

सितशोणबिन्दुयुगलं विविक्तशिवशक्तिसङ्कुचत्प्रसरम् ।
वागर्थसृष्टिहेतुः परस्परानुप्रविष्टविस्पष्टम् ॥
बिन्दुरहङ्कारात्मा रविरेतन्मिथुनसमरसाकारः ।
कामः कमनीयतया कला च दहनेन्दुविग्रहौ बिन्दू ॥

KāmKVil 6–7

The two Bindus, white and red, are Śiva and Śakti, who, in their secret mutual enjoyment, are now expanding and now contracting. They are the cause of the creation of Word (*Vāk*) and Meaning (*Artha*), now entering and now separating from one another. Bindu which is *Ahaṅkāra* (*Ahaṅkārātmā*) is the Sun which is the union of these two (white and red *Bindus*). The sun is *Kāma*, which is so called because of its desirableness; and *Kalā* is the two Bindus which are Moon and Fire. (Tr. A. Avalon)

"The interaction of the bindus causes nectar or creative fluid to flow out. This is the so-called Hārdha-kalā, the essence of ānanda. The interaction is like the heat of fire acting on butter and causing it to melt and flow. ...The substance of delight which flows out constitutes the essence of all the creative principles." (G.Kaviraj, *Aspects of Indian Thought*, p. 200)

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The spiritual entities are described as luminous, and compared with luminaries of the material world. In the language of **Śrītattvacintāmaṇi** (VI.13) Parameśvarī in the *mūlādhāra cakra* is *mūlacakrāntaravivaralasatkoṭisūryaprakāśā*, "who shines within the *mūlacakra*, with the lustre of ten million suns"; *kuṇḍalinī* is *navīnacapalāmālāvilāsāspadā* (10) "her lustre is as that of a strong flash of young strong lightning", 'who shines like a chain of brilliant lights' (*vilasati proddāmadīptāvaliḥ*, (11) and the *citriṇī nāḍī* (within the *suṣumnā*) is *vidyunmālāvilāsā* (3) 'beautiful like a chain of lightning'. (Tr. A. Avalon)

The **Svacchanda Tantra** (XI.9) says: *nādād binduḥ samutpannaḥ sūryakoṭisamaprabhaḥ*, 'from *nāda* evolves *bindu*, luminous like millions of suns.' The **Mālinīvijaya Tantra** (XII.11) describes *bindu* as *sphurattārakasannibhaḥ* 'like a luminous star'.

Manifestation in the Arts

In the context of aesthetic experience of *rasa*, the imagery of fire has been used in the **Nāṭya-Śāstra**:

शरीरं व्याप्यते तेन शुष्कं काष्ठम् इवाग्निना ।

NŚ VII.7

By that the body is permeated as dry wood is engulfed by fire.

What is consumed by fire, becomes fire itself; this *tanmayībhāva* is behind the use. In the context of poetics, *prasāda*, lucidity, by bringing about an easy comprehension of the sense, quickly pervades the mind like fire spreading over dry fuel:

चित्तं व्याप्नोति यः क्षिप्रं शुष्केन्धनमिवानलः ।
स प्रसादः ... ॥

SāDar VIII.8

What quickly pervades the mind just as fire pervades the dry fuel, is *prasāda.*

Song, instrumental music and acting should be so harmonized that the aggregate becomes perceptible to the aesthete as a single comprehension. In order to show this, the **Nāṭya-Śāstra** (XXVIII.7) uses the imagery of *alātacakra* 'a fire-brand carried around (and appearing like a wheel)'.

Agni, the presiding deity of speech (*vāc*), is related to the process of articulation of sound in the human body, as told in the **Pāṇinīya Śikṣā** (6–7). Hence

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agni is also related to music. The **Saṅgīta-Ratnākara** deals with the human body from the physiological and psychological points of view and meditation on the *cakra*s as related to the cultivation of music. Following the Yoga tradition, it speaks of a flame in the centre of the body:

आधाराद् द्व्यङ्गुलादूर्ध्वं मेहनाद् द्व्यङ्गुलादधः ।
एकाङ्गुलं देहमध्यं तप्तजाम्बूनदप्रभम् ॥
तत्रास्तेऽग्निशिखा तन्वी ... ॥

SR I.2.145–146a

Two finger-length above the base and two finger breadth below the genitals in the space of one-finger breadth is the centre of the body, shining like molten gold. There is located a slender flame of fire. (Tr. R.K. Shringy & P.L. Sharma)

आत्मा विवक्षमाणोऽयं मनः प्रेरयते मनः ।
देहस्थं वह्निमाघ्नन्ति स प्रेरयति मारुतम् ॥
ब्रह्मग्रन्थिस्थितः सोऽथ क्रमादूर्ध्वपथे चरन् ।
नाभिहृत्कण्ठमूर्धास्येष्वाविर्भावयति ध्वनिम् ॥

SR I.3.3–4

Desirous of speech the individuated being impels the mind, and the mind activates the battery of power [fire] stationed in the body, which in its turn stimulates the vital force. The vital force stationed around the root of the navel rising upwards gradually manifests sound (*nāda*) in the navel, the heart, the throat, the cerebrum and the cavity of the mouth as it passes through them. (Tr. R.K. Shringy & P.L. Sharma)

Nāda is produced by the interaction of the vital force and fire (*jātaḥ prāṇāgnisaṃyogāt tena nādo'bhidhīyate*, SR I.3.6).

Dealing with the science of composition based on metaphysical conceptions, the **Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad** speaks of the symbolism of fire and the conception of lines. Vertical lines and upright triangles represent fire (VSUp II.15,21), as they symbolize illumination and upward tendency of human aspiration.

The three Vedic sacrificial fires and the various fire altars are associated with some geometrical figures. The hearth of the *āhavanīya* is square, that of the *gārhapatya* is circular, and that of the *dakṣiṇa* is semi-circular.

The Śulba-Sūtras lay down the rules for construction of various sacrificial altars from the geometrical aspect. *Suparṇaciti*, the most famous of the different *citis*, is described in the **Kātyāyana Śrauta-Sūtra** XVI. After explaining

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the square and the circle, the **Kātyāyana Śulba-Sūtra** mentions six different *citis*: *droṇacit, rathacakracit, kaṅkacit, pra-u-gacit, ubhayataḥprauga* and *samūhyapurīṣa*. "*Droṇa*, water trough, is square shaped. A fire-altar having the same shape is called *droṇacit*. The chariot wheel is circular. A fire altar having the same shape is called *rathacakracit*. *Kaṅka* is the crane flying in the sky. A fire altar having the same shape is called *kaṅkacit*. *Prauga*, triangle, is a part of the chariot, made up of the two poles. A fire-altar with the same shape is called *praugacit*. A fire-altar in which the shape is repeated on both sides is called *Ubhayataḥprauga* (rhombus shaped). It is broad in the middle (and tapering on both sides). A fire-altar for which (instead of bricks) earth is carried from elsewhere is called *Samuhyapurīṣa*; (it has round shape)" – Mahīdhara's Comm. on **Kātyāyana Śulba-Sūtra** IV.1. (tr. S.R. Sarma)

These basic geometrical forms which have been largely used also in the Tāntric *maṇḍalas* or *yantras*, provide the basis for a language of form in the field of ancient Indian architecture and sculpture. The Vāstu-Śāstra texts, therefore, use these geometrical forms in the plan of temple architecture.

Agni is variously associated with the construction and consecration of temples. The *Vāstupuruṣa* is conceived as of anthropomorphic form of gigantic dimension. According to the **Bṛhat Saṃhitā:**

पूर्वोत्तरदिङ्मूर्धा पुरुषोऽयमवाङ्मुखोऽस्य शिरसि शिखी ।

BṛSam 53.51ab

This (Vāstu)puruṣa who lies prone (on the site), has his head turned towards the North-East. Fire is situated on his head. (Tr. M.R. Bhat)

The idea that each of the five elements is predominantly connected with different parts of the body is found also in temple architecture: "The sanctum is said to symbolize the universe, constituted by the five primary and universal elements (*tattvas*) . . . the superstructure over the sanctum (*vimāna*) [represents] the 'fire' element" (S.K.R. Rao, *Maṇḍalas in Temple Worship*, pp.7–8).

For describing the circular *vajramastaka* on the *rāhā* (central broad vertical projection of the spire) of a temple, the **Śilpa Prakāśa** says:

पार्श्वे तथा छेदभागे कुञ्चिताकृतिगुम्फना ।
अग्नेः शिखासमं तत्र वेष्टनं मण्डले तथा ॥

ŚiPrak II.401

The parts there on the sides should be incised with rows (*gumphana*) of curling forms like tongues of fire (*agni-śikhā*) surrounding the *maṇḍala*. (Tr. A. Boner)

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Figure 24: Agni on ram: Siṃhanātha Temple, Orissa, 9th Cent. A.D.

In the context of the consecration ceremony, the **Mayamata** prescribes:

प्रासादस्य चतुर्दिक्षु वृत्तकुण्डविधानतः ।
सन्तर्प्य स्थापको जातवेदसं निवसेत् तदा ॥

Mayam XVIII.180

Then the *sthāpaka* puts fire in circular fire-pits at the four cardinal points of the temple. (Tr. B. Dagens)

The anthropomorphic conception of Agni encouraged images. Though Agni as a principal deity lost its position in the post-Vedic texts, he is retained as one of the guardian deities of the eight quarters. From the viewpoint of an iconographer, the **Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa** (III.56) is considered of greatest importance, though there are also other sources influencing the image of Agni in ancient Indian sculpture (e.g. MatPur CCLXI.9–12).

Figures of Agni are found in temples. T.A. Gopinatha Rao describes two interesting figures of Agni, found in the Śiva temples at Kandiyur and at Chidambaram (Vol.II, Pt.II,p.524 illustrated, plates CLII, fig.2; CLIII). Agni has there two heads (goat-heads at Kandiyur), seven arms and three legs (at Chidambaram, the figure of Agni stands in front of a bull, not a he-goat or a ram; the bull is there most probably because of Agni's identification with Rudra). These images agree very well with the following description of Agni in the **Rauravāgama**:

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एकहृदयं द्विवक्त्रं द्विनासं च षडक्षकम् ।
त्रिमेखलं त्रिपादं च सप्तजिह्वासमन्वितम् ॥
वृषारूढं चतुःशृङ्गं सप्तदोर्दक्षिणे चतुः ।
त्रिहस्तं वामपार्श्वे तु सर्वावयवसंयुतम् ॥
शक्तिरग्नि तथा स्रुक् च स्रुवो वै दक्षिणे करे ।
तोमरं व्यजनं वामे घृतपात्रं विशेषतः ॥

RauĀ kp XV.14–16

The firegod is to be conceived as having one heart, two faces, two noses, six eyes, three girdles, three feet and possessed of seven tongues. He is riding on a bull. He has four horns. Of its seven arms four are on the right but on the left side he has three hands. He is accomplished with all limbs. He is holding by his right hands a spear, blazing fire, sacrificial wooden ladle (*sruk* and *sruva*) and by the left hand he holds a lance, a fan and particularly a pot of clarified butter. (Tr. H.N. Chakarvarty)

This description has again very remarkable similarity with the **Ṛgveda** IV.58.3.

Classification

Fire has been classified according to different criteria. Following the Vedic tradition, *agni* is said to be threefold, appearing in three regions; celestial, atmospheric and terrestrial. Terrestrial fire is twofold, natural and produced (MīmSūBh II.3.4). From the ritual viewpoint, *agni* is twofold, ordinary and sacrificial. The sacrificial fire is again twofold, *śrauta* and *gṛhya* (or *smārta*). The *śrauta* fire is threefold – *āhavanīya, gārhapatya* and *dakṣiṇa* (fivefold, if *sabhya* and *āvasathya* are included).

In the **Vibhaṅga Pāli** *agni* is said to be of three kinds:

रागग्गि, दोसग्गि, मोहग्गि – इमे तयो अग्गी ।

Vibh XVII.4.22

The fire of lust; the fire of hatred; the fire of dullness. These are three types of fire. (Tr. P.A. Thiṭṭila)

In the **Saṃyutta Nikāya** (IV.19) and **Aṅguttara Nikāya** (IV.41) the description of seven types of fires is noted.

In the **Milinda Pañha** the fivefold qualities of *agni* are mentioned:

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तेजस्स पञ्च अङ्गानि गहेतब्बानी ...
तेजो तिणकट्ठसाखापलासं डहति ... ।
तेजो निद्दयो अकारुणिको ... ।
तेजो सीतं पटिहनति ... ।
तेजो अनुनयप्पटिघविप्पमुत्तो उण्हमभिजनेति ... ।
तेजो अन्धकारं विधमति आलोकं दस्सयति ... ।

MilPañ VI.3.3

The fivefold qualities of fire are to be known as:
Fire burns grass, sticks, branches and leaves;
Fire has neither pity, nor mercy;
Fire destroys cold;
Fire seeks neither favour nor disfavour from any beings, but bestows heat on all;
Fire dispells darkness and makes the light to appear.
(Tr. Narasingha Ch. Panda)

In the Purāṇas, original Agni, his three sons and forty-five grandsons are together called forty-nine fires (KūrPur I.13.17).

A classification of fire in the Vaiśeṣika system may be found in the following extract from the **Praśastapāda Bhāṣya**:

तदपि द्विविधम् अणुकार्यभावात् । कार्यं च शरीरादित्रयं शरीरेन्द्रियविषय-संज्ञकम् । शरीरमयोनिजमेव आदित्यलोके पार्थिवावयवोपष्टम्भाच्चोपभोग-समर्थम् । इन्द्रियं सर्वप्राणिनां रूपव्यञ्जकम् अन्यावयवानभिभूतैस्तेजोऽववैः आरब्धं चक्षुः । विषयसंज्ञकं चतुर्विधं – भौमं दिव्यमुदर्यमाकरजं च । तत्र भौमं काष्ठेन्धनप्रभवमूर्ध्वज्वलनस्वभावं पचनदहनस्वेदनादिसमर्थं; दिव्यम् अबिन्धनं सौरविद्युदादि । भुक्तस्य आहारस्य रसादिभावेन परिणाम-समर्थमुदर्यम् । आकरजं सुवर्णादि ।

VaiśSūBh, Tejo'dhikaraṇa

This also is two-fold, in the form of the atom and the products. These products are three-fold, in the shape of the Body etc. The body of fire is such only as is not born of the womb, existing in the regions of the Sun (Āditya); and it is made capable of experience by the admixture of earth molecules. The sense-organ is the Eye, which makes colour perceptible, by all living beings, and which is made up of fire molecules unaffected by the molecules of any other substance. This object is four-fold: Earthly, Heavenly, Stomachic (organic) and Mineral. The earthly fire is that which consists of flames, produced by wooden fuels, and is capable of accomplishing cooking, burning, softening (according to the Kandalī), sweating & c. The Heavenly

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Fire is that which is produced by watery fuel, and exists in the form of the Sun, the Lightning and the like. The Stomachic Fire is that which brings about the digestion of the food that is eaten. The Mineral Fire exists in the form of Gold and the other metals.
(Tr. G.N. Jha)

It may be noted here that though brilliant white colour and hot touch are the distinctive attributes of fire, they are not equally manifested in all the effects mentioned above; e.g. both colour and touch are manifest in the rays of the sun; only colour is manifest in the moonlight, but touch is unmanifest; in boiling water or in a frying pan, colour is unmanifest, but hot touch is manifest; in the eye, through which the power of vision operates, neither colour nor touch is manifest.

Similarly, for classification of the bodily fire, we may turn to the following passage of the **Suśruta Saṃhitā:**

तच्चादृष्टहेतुकेन विशेषेण पक्वामाशयमध्यस्थं पित्तं चतुर्विधमन्नपानं पचति, विवेचयति च दोषरसमूत्रपुरीषाणि; तत्रस्थमेव चात्मशक्त्या शेषाणां पित्तस्थानानां शरीरस्य चाग्निकर्मणाऽनुग्रहं करोति, तस्मिन् पित्ते पाचकोऽग्निरिति संज्ञा; यत्तु यकृत्प्लीह्नोः पित्तं तस्मिन् रञ्जकोऽग्निरिति संज्ञा, स रसस्य रागकृदुक्तः; यत् पित्तं हृदयस्थं तस्मिन् साधकोऽग्निरिति संज्ञा, सोऽभिप्रार्थितमनोरथसाधनकृदुक्तः; यद्दृष्ट्यां पित्तं तस्मिन्नालोचकोऽग्निरिति संज्ञा, स रूपग्रहणाधिकृतः; यत्तु त्वचि पित्तं तस्मिन् भ्राजकोऽग्निरिति संज्ञा, सोऽभ्यङ्गपरिषेकावगाहालेपनादीनां क्रियाद्रव्याणां पक्ता छायानां च प्रकाशकः ।

SuSam SūSthā XXI.10

By the ordination of fate or necessity (unfathomable nature cause) the Pittam, located in the region between the stomach (Āmāśaya) and the intestines (Pakvāśaya), helps the digestion of the four kinds of food (such as drink and edibles etc.) partaken of by a living subject, and purges off the residue or impure morbiferous matter in the shape of urine and excreta after the completion of the process. Even thus located, it keeps up the temperature in its other distant location (skin, etc.) in virtue of its native heat-giving attribute. Hence this Pittam is called the Pācakāgni (digestive fire or heat) in an animated organism. The function of the Pittam, which has its seats in the liver and the spleen, consists in imparting characteristic pigment (Rāgakṛt) to the lymph chyle and is hence known as Rañjakāgni (lit: dyeing fire or pigment bile). The Pittam seated in the heart is dominated as the Sādhakāgni (performing or operating heat or fire)

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inasmuch as its action is to bring about the fruition or realisation of one's desires. The Pittam, which is located in the pupils of the eyes, is called the Ālocakāgni (the Pittam or fire or sight) as its office is to catch the image of any external object presented to the eyes. The Pittam, which has its seat in the skin, is called the Bhrājakāgni (illuminating or irradiating heat) inasmuch, as lubrications, etc. and irradiates the glow of one's natural complexion.
(Tr. K.L. Bhisagratna)

Process

The Vedas depict Vedic religion, in the words of Louis Renou (1953:29), as "first and foremost a liturgy, and only secondarily a mythological or speculative system." A characteristic of this liturgy or ritual is that it does not correspond in any way to "the most important mythical episodes, those which reflect cosmogonic events" (Renou 1953:16).

However independent they are from each other, both the Agni mythologies of the **Ṛgveda** and the Agni rituals of the **Yajur-Veda** reflect early stages of mankind's experience with fire. At first – at least 250,000 years ago – our ancestors could not produce fire but it had to be collected, carried on flat or hollow stones, and kept alive in pots. The collection of fire from lightning led to the belief that fire comes from heaven. This is still consistent with the legend of Mātariśvan and is reflected in the *agnicayana* and other Vedic fire rituals, where fires are kept and transported in pots. Vedic ritual preserves another feature from this early stage of human evolution: fires retain their individuality; they are set up and installed on separate altars, and as long as they are not intentionally combined or mixed, they have to be kept distinct. Moreover, though fire is already available it has to be made separately on seven occasions in the course of the *agnicayana*. Each time it has to be ritually prepared, that is (in the Vedic case) by friction. Although we would regard the results as identical, fire could not be made ritually with the help of a lighter or by lighting a match.

The earliest technologies for the production of fire – dating from approximately 50,000 years ago – have also survived: the two basic procedures are percussion or strike-a-light method and friction. Vedic ritual preserves the alternative method, *agnimanthana*, in which two pieces of wood are used. This practice underlies the belief that fire resides in wood, and that it is not made, but extracted or released. The Roman philosopher-poet Lucretius (1st Cent. B.C.) expressed the same idea:

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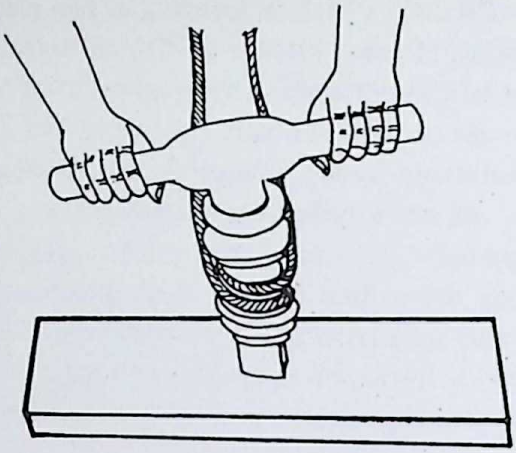

Figure 25: Churning of fire by friction

> If in logs flame lurks hidden, and smoke and ash, it must need be that the logs are composed of things alien in kind, of alien things that rise up out of the logs (*De rerum natura* I.871–72).

The Warao Indians of South America, who continue to make fire by friction, similarly deny that fire is made. According to them, it existed from time immemorial and elaborate mythologies are needed to explain that some trees contain it and others do not. Similar beliefs existed in the Vedic period and they influenced the formation of Vedic ritual. But ritual is independent from such beliefs: the beliefs disappeared but the Vedic ritual survived for three thousand years.

In the Brāhmaṇas Prajāpati is said to have created Agni from the earth or from his own mouth. The **Chāndogya Upaniṣad** (VI.2.3) records a tradition according to which fire (*tejas*) was the first element to emanate from *ātman*, then water and thereafter, earth. The pure elements were then combined through the process of *trivṛtkaraṇa*. The **Taittirīya Upaniṣad** (II.1) however speaks of all the five elements gradually emanating from *ātman*. In the said order of creation, fire originated from wind.

As an element, *agni* is a part of the process of creation of the material world. The most generally accepted order of creation or evolution of the five *mahābhūtas* is: *ākāśa*, *vāyu*, *agni*, *ap* and *pṛthivī*. That *agni* evolves out of *vāyu*, is noticed in the **Mahābhārata**:

वायोरपि विकुर्वाणाज् ज्योतिर्भूतं तमोनुदम् ।

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रोचिष्णु जायते ... ॥

XII.224.37 (cf. Manu I.77)

From wind also, by modification, orginates light induced with effulgence. (Tr. M.N. Dutt)

From *agni* originates water. But elsewhere *agni* is said to have originated from *ap* 'water':

अद्भ्योऽग्निर्ब्रह्मतः क्षत्रमश्मनो लोहमुत्थितम् ।
तेषां सर्वत्रगं तेजः स्वासु योनिषु शाम्यति ॥

MBh XII.79.22 (also Manu IX.321)

Fire has originated from water; the Kshatriya, from the Brahman, and iron, from stone. The power of fire, the Kshatriya, and iron, are irresistible. But when these conflict with their sources of origin, their force becomes neutralised. (Tr. M.N. Dutt)

According to the Vedānta system, *brahman* is the ultimate source of everything. In the process of creation *agni* originates directly from *vāyu* in the form of *sūkṣmabhūta* 'subtle element'. It is indeed originated from *brahman* which has assumed the form of *vāyu* (BrSū 2.3.10). The subtle rudiments of matter, when compounded through the process of *pañcīkaraṇa* 'quintuplication', that makes one of them predominant, give rise to the gross elements.

In the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system, *tejas* is of two kinds, eternal and transitory; *agni* is eternal in the form of atom (*paramāṇu*), in the form of effects beginning with the dyad it is transitory. In the process of creation, conjunction of one atom of fire with another results in a dyad (*dvyaṇuka*), conjunction of three dyads of fire results in a triad (*trasareṇu* or *tryaṇuka*); and thus the process continues upto the great mass of fire. In the process of dissolution, the operation takes place in a reverse order, i.e. because of disjunction, the effects are reduced to the state of atoms of fire.

According to the Sāṃkhya-Yoga system, five *tanmātra*s are produced from *ahaṃkāra*; and five gross elements (*mahābhūta*s), come into existence from these five *tanmātra*s. From the *rūpatanmātra*, the subtle principle of luminosity, evolves the element *agni*. According to the Āgamas and Tantras, when the supreme Lord manifests Himself as the universe by means of this Śakti at the time of creation, different *tattva*s 'principles' come into being. In the process, the five *tanmātra*s (subtle or rudimentary elements) originate from *ahaṃkāra*, and the five gross elements are products of these *tanmātra*s. *Agni* is produced from *rūpa-tanmātra* (ŚāTil I.20).

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Conclusion

Agni in its various aspects as sacrificial fire, as god of fire, as element, as physical and spiritual energy, has permeated the entire field of Indian cosmology, ritual, medicine and Yoga. Its illuminating power and symbolic representations in fire-altars and sacred diagrams (*yantra, maṇḍala*) have influenced the various art-forms. *Agni* is the very image of divine energy manifesting at different levels, an image of divine splendour and inner illumination. But the basic importance of *agni* lies in its ritual function of purification and transformation, and as mediator between men and the gods. Thus the cosmic – elemental, ritual and divine aspects of *agni* are closely interwoven.

Samiran Chandra Chakrabarti
Agni: Vedic (Saṃhitās) by Frits Staal

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JYOTIS/TEJAS/PRAKĀŚA

Overview

Etymological analysis clearly differentiates the words *jyotis* (n.) and *prakāśa* (mfn.), which are both derived from roots signifying 'light', from the word *tejas* which is derived from a root meaning 'to be sharp'. The original meaning of *jyotis* is a luminous body, such as a star; that of *tejas* is a sharp object, such as a ray of light; that of *prakāśa* is sunshine and exposure to the eyes of a visible ('luminous') object. The historical evolution has brought these three words into a closer relationship. Firstly, *jyotis* and *tejas* have been associated with reference to the conception of a material element, namely fire. This concept is, in fact, very comprehensive; it covers light, the luminous bodies and all kinds of shining. When the idea of energy or power is associated with the idea of light, the word *tejas* is used, in conformity with its initial sense. *Tejas* is the preferred designation of the *śakti* of God, especially His will (*icchā*). *Prakāśa* in the general sense of light, both illuminated and illuminating, is the property to be manifest and to make manifest. It has been the word attached to the Sāṃkhya concept of *sattva*, i.e. the illuminating substance included in the basic matter of the world and all its evolutes, psychic and physical, responsible for the formation of clear knowledge. The major development of the concept of light appears in the application of these three words to the idea of knowledge in two forms, namely the concept of knowledge as a transformation of psychic matter and the concept of consciousness. It culminates in its application to the essence of the highest principle of Indian metaphysics, that is *ātman-brahman*.

Etymology and Related Words

Jyotis can be considered to be derived of the root *dyut-* 'to shine'. Its connection with that root is accepted by Yāska:

> अथाप्यादिविपर्ययो भवति । ज्योतिः ।
>
> Nir II.1
>
> Further, there is alteration in the initial part (of the root), as in *jyotiḥ* (root *dyut*, 'light'). (Tr. L. Sarup)

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The *Uṇādisūtra* annexed to Pāṇini's grammar also derives the word *jyotis* from the root *dyut-* with the suffix *isan* and the substitution of *j* for the initial *d* (see also Śabara on MīmSū IV.4.40). Other grammarians have accepted an independent root *jyut-* having the same meaning (Kauśika referred to by Kṣīrasvāmin in his commentary on the Dhātupāṭha, Kṣīrataraṅgiṇī I.27).

The root *dyut-* is related to an Indo-European root having connotations of light, and which has produced words for god, heaven, daylight etc. Thus in Greek *di(v)-os*, Latin *Iūpiter*, *di-es* etc. The grammatical peculiarity of the noun *jyotis* is that it is neuter when it expresses the meanings 'light, stars, pupil of the eye' and masculine when it refers to fire or the sun.

Tejas, always neuter, is derived from the root *tija- niśāne* 'to be sharp' which has also an Indo-European prehistory (cf. Greek *stigma*, Latin *in-stigare*, English *sting*, German *stechen* etc.). In Sanskrit, starting from Vedic times, *tejas* first expressed the meaning of a sharp ray of light, point of a flame and then fire and light.

Prakāśa is derived from the root *kāśṛ dīptau* 'to shine' with the prefix *pra-* and the suffix *ac* or *ghañ*. Its original sense is 'sunshine' and it conveys the idea of coming in sight or to be openly exposed. It is used as an adjective signifying 'shining, visible', adverbially in the sense 'openly' and as a masculine noun referring primarily to light. The hypothesis of an Indo-European origin of this root has been proposed by connecting it with a word signifying the eye: *kāś-* < $*q^{w}ek$- < $**oq$-ek-: *akṣi*. A trace of such an origin survives in Sanskrit in that some derivatives of *kāś-* refer to light in connection with sight, to all that is exposed to the eye.

Layers of Meaning

Each of these three words has one or several original meanings which it does not share with the two others. These are: 'star' for *jyotis*, 'sharp effulgence' for *tejas* and 'openness, exposure' for *prakāśa*. A second layer, equally ancient, is common to the three. That is the idea of light which may be considered to be their main meaning. Two of them, *jyotis* and *tejas*, are especially applied to the element fire. They become, in this respect, synonymous with *agni*. This third layer may not be as ancient as the previous ones, because it developed along with the concept of the *mahābhūtas* which does not have the same antiquity. A fourth layer of meaning is also common to the three words which occurs in later usage. This is the development of their meaning as 'knowledge' in line with

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the imagery of light, a development which took place mostly in philosophical speculations and expositions.

The proper meaning of *jyotis* is 'star'. This is clear from the fact that astronomy and astrology are called *jyotiṣa-śāstra* (the regular form *jyautiṣa-* is not in common use (see Gaṇar IV. 306). However, the etymological, basic and most common meaning is 'light'. Thus, Amarasiṃha recognizes three meanings:

ज्योतिर्भद्योतदृष्टिषु ।

ज्योतते ज्योतिः, भं तारका, द्योतः प्रकाशः, दृष्टिः कनीनिकामध्यम् ।

AmKo III.3.230 and Kṣīrasvāmin's Comm.

Jyotis means 'star, light, pupil of the eye'.
Jyotis is derived from the root *jyut-*: one that shines is a *jyotis*. *Bha* is a star, *dyota* is light, *dṛṣṭi* is the pupil of the eye.

The **Śabdakalpadruma** gives the same basic meanings for *jyotis* as a neuter noun. It adds that the word is also masculine when it refers to fire, sun, a plant called *methikā* and the god Viṣṇu. The masculine form with these meanings is secondary.

The common meaning of *tejas* is 'shining' and 'light'. Its etymological meaning, namely, 'sharpness, pointedness' is generally forgotten (except in Hindi, where *tej* means sharp). From this original meaning the word has come to express the point of a flame, a sharp ray of light, and then fire, light themselves. The idea of sharpness and keenness survives in the meanings connoting strength, valour etc. and also in its other meanings, a certain shining in the form of radiance, effulgence, the dynamic, expansive, or even harmful aspect of light and fire. Amarasiṃha knows four fundamental current meanings:

तेजः प्रभावे दीप्तौ च बले शुक्रेऽपि ।

तिज निशाने तेजः । अपिशब्दादसहनत्वे यङ्गरतः – अधिक्षेपावमानादेः प्रयुक्तस्य परेण यत् । प्राणात्ययेऽप्यसहनं तत्तेजः समुदाहृतम् ॥

AmKo III.3.234 and Kṣīrasvāmin's Comm.

Tejas means "power, light, strength and semen".

Tejas is derived from the root *tij-* 'to be sharp'. The particle *api* implies that the word means also 'inability to endure', as Bharata says: "The inability to endure abuse, contempt etc. coming from a hostile person, or the loss of life, is called *tejas*." (NŚ XXII.41)

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In the course of time the word *tejas* has developed a great number of secondary significations: light, power, valour, semen, essence, lustre of the body, fresh butter, fire, gold, marrow, bile, inability to endure, Viṣṇu, and Śiva.

The original meaning of *prakāśa* is 'openness' in the sense of 'exposure to sight'. This meaning is particularly current when the word is used as an adverb. However, the most common general meaning is 'light' and especially sunshine, connoting heat. Amarasiṃha mentions the word two times:

> प्रकाशो द्योत आतपः ॥
> प्रकाशोऽतिप्रसिद्धेऽपि ।
>
> प्रकाशते प्रकाशनं च प्रकाशः । अपिशब्दात्प्रकटे उद्द्योते च ।
>
> AmKo I.3.34, III.3.218 and Kṣīrasvāmin's Comm.

Prakāśa means 'sunshine, heat'.
Prakāśa means also 'very famous'.

Prakāśa is an agent or action noun derived from the root *kāś-* with the prefix *pra-*: it is that which shines or the act of shining. The particle *api* implies that it means 'openly' and 'light'.

The **Śabdakalpadruma** has only one meaning to add, namely the rare use in neuter in the sense of 'brass'. The meaning 'very famous' appears to be a development of the meaning 'open, manifest'. It has certainly contributed to the development of its ulterior meaning 'light of knowledge'. The words *jyotis* and *tejas* share this meaning with *prakāśa*. However, *prakāśa* seems to have been preferred in philosophical literature.

Development of the Concept

Light has been one of the most inspiring themes for the Vedic poets. The word *prakāśa* appears only once in the **Ṛgveda** in connection with the sky or the sun and the intermediary space:

> इदं स्वरिदमिदास वाममयं प्रकाश उर्वऽन्तरिक्षम् ।
>
> ṚV X.124.6ab

Here is the light of heaven, here all is lovely; here there is radiance, here is air's wide region. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

This stanza refers to the sun and the intermediary space; *prakāśa* is in between, it is light but also the sky which it pervades. *Prakāśa* does not seem to be completely differentiated from →*ākāśa*.

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The word *tejas* appears in the **Ṛgveda** only five times and only in the sense of 'sharp', 'heat' and 'power'. For instance, in the context of the union of Sky (Dyauḥ Pitā) and Dawn, Father and Daughter, the **Ṛgveda** declares:

आ यदिषे नृपतिं तेज आनट्छुचि रेतो निषिक्तं द्यौरभीके ।
अग्निः शर्धमनवद्यं युवानं स्वाध्यं जनयत्सूदयच्च ॥

ṚV I.71.8

When the (genital) ardour entered the Lord of Men for his enjoyment, the (Father) Sky immediately (dropped) the pure, spilt semen. Agni begat the strength (of the Aṅgirases) unreviled, young and of good intents, he made (them) accomplished beings. (Based on the tr. by L. Renou)

This passage is a forerunner of the use of *tejas* in the sense of semen. It also announces the classical myth of the reception of divine semen by Agni. Kālidāsa uses the same word *tejas* in:

अथ नयनसमुत्थं ज्योतिरत्रेरिव द्यौः
सुरसरिदिव तेजो वह्निनिष्ठ्यूतमैशम् ।
नरपतिकुलभूत्यै गर्भमाधत्त राज्ञी
गुरुभिरभिनिविष्टं लोकपालानुभावैः ॥

Ragh II.75

As the heavens, the luminary sprung from the eyes of Atri, and as the river of the gods (i.e. the Gaṅgā), the lustre of the Lord deposited by Agni, so the queen bore the embryo, which contained the heavy essences of the lords of directions for the prosperity of the royal race. (Based on the tr. by G.R. Nandargikar)

The most common word for light in the **Ṛgveda** is *jyotis* with 144 occurrences. It is the light of the fire, of the celestial luminaries, day, dawn and so forth:

नि त्वामग्ने मनुर्दधे ज्योतिर्जनाय शश्वते ।
दीदेथ कण्व ऋतजात उक्षितो यं नमस्यन्ति कृष्टयः ॥

ṚV I.36.19

Manu has established thee a luminary for all successive human beings. Thou blazed for Kaṇva, O (god) born from the Sacred Order, whom, (once) you are grown up, the people reverence. (Based on the tr. by L. Renou)

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इदं श्रेष्ठं ज्योतिषां ज्योतिरागाच्चित्रः प्रकेतो अजनिष्ट विभ्वा ।
यथा प्रसूता सवितुः सवायं एवा रात्र्युषसे योनिमारैक् ॥

ṚV I.113.1

This one, the best, the light of the lights, has come; the effulgent signal is born, being diffused. As night was set in motion to (counteract) the impulse of Savitṛ, in the same way it has given way to dawn. (Based on the tr. by L. Renou)

विभ्राजञ्ज्योतिषा स्वरगच्छो रोचनं दिवः ।
येनेमा विश्वा भुवनान्याभृता विश्वकर्मणा विश्वदेव्यावता ॥

ṚV X.170.4

Radiant with light, (as) the sun you have come in the shining field of the sky, you by whom all these beings were brought, you maker of the universe, possessor of all divine essence. (Based on the tr. by L. Renou)

In the **Ṛgveda**, *jyotis* represents also the concept of an inner light as an immortal essence, thought, belonging to God or man:

अयं होता प्रथमः पश्यतेममिदं ज्योतिरमृतं मर्त्येषु ।
अयं स जज्ञे ध्रुव आ निषत्तोऽमर्त्यस्तन्वा वर्धमानः ॥
ध्रुवं ज्योतिर्निहितं दृशये कं मनो जविष्ठं पतयत्स्वन्तः ।
विश्वे देवाः समनसः सकेता एकं क्रतुमभि वि यन्ति साधु ॥
वि मे कर्णा पतयतो वि चक्षुर्वीदं ज्योतिर्हृदय आहितं यत् ।
वि मे मनश्चरति दूरआधीः किं स्विद्वक्ष्यामि किमु नू मनिष्ये ॥

ṚV VI.9.4–6

This (god Agni Vaiśvānara) is the first oblator; behold him; he is this immortal light in mortal (beings); this (god) is born, lastingly installed, immortal, growing in his body.

He is the light, which has a fixed place to be seen, which is thought, the swiftest among flying (things). All the gods, with the same thought and intent, straightaway go towards (him) the unique (meeting point of human) powers.

My ears fly far away, far away my eye, far away this light which is placed in the heart, far away move my thoughts of remote sighting; what shall I say, what shall I think? (Based on the tr. by L. Renou)

In the **Yajur-Veda**, the concept of light appears closely connected with the ritual fire. Fire is the main instrument of the ritual. Its physical substance,

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its light, its presence in the burnt oblation are all successively considered. The word *tejas* is used particularly with reference to the flame, while the word *jyotis* is preferred for the light and other aspects of fire. For instance, in the context of the new and full moon sacrifice a number of gestures of the celebrant are accompanied with a series of *yajus*, collected in the **Taittirīya Saṃhitā**, which invoke fire or light. When the celebrant carries fire from the permanent *gārhapatya* fireplace to the oblatory *āhavanīya*, he looks at the latter (ĀpŚrSū I.18.4) and says:

सुवरभि वि ख्येषं वैश्वानरं ज्योतिः ... ।

TSam I.1.4.2

May I behold the light, the radiance for all men. (Tr. A.B. Keith)

Here the Vaiśvānara fire is designated directly by the word *jyotis*, which the commentator Bhaṭṭa Bhāskara takes to be an attribute of the *āhavanīya* fire which is *dyotanaśīlam* 'endowed with radiance'. When the officiant takes up the sacrificial implements and heats them in the *gārhapatya* fire, he looks at the *ājya* 'clarified butter offering' carried from the *gārhapatya* to the *āhavanīya* fire and says:

अग्नेर्वस्तेजिष्ठेन तेजसा निष्टपामि ... तेजोऽसि तेजोऽनु प्रेह्यग्निस्ते तेजो मा वि नैत् ... शुक्रमसि ज्योतिरसि तेजोऽसि ... ॥

TSam I.1.10

With Agni's keenest flame I burn you... Thou art brilliance, follow thou brilliance, may Agni not take away the brilliance... Thou art the shining, the radiance, the brilliance... (Tr. A.B. Keith)

Later the officiant addresses the *juhū* containing the oblation of clarified butter. He identifies the oblation with the light of the fire itself (see also TSam III.12.5.12 and MīmSūBh I.4.29):

मखस्य शिरोऽसि सं ज्योतिषा ज्योतिरङ्क्ताम् ॥

TSam I.1.12

Thou art the head of *Makha* (sacrifice), be light united with light. (Tr. A.B. Keith)

In this early period *jyotis* also directly denotes the stars and celestial luminaries:

सूर्यो ज्योतिषाँ श्रेष्ठो... ।

TSam III.1.1.2

The sun is the best of the (celestial) luminaries. (Tr. A.B. Keith)

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Or, with the commentators Bhaṭṭa Bhāskara and Sāyaṇa, we may take *jyotis* to be a more general designation for all objects which shed light (*prakāśaka*) and give the ability to see (*darśanahetubhūta*).

The **Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā** also contains many invocations of light to accompany oblations in fire, such as the formulas for the *agnihòtra*, the morning oblation dedicated to Sūrya and the evening oblation dedicated to Agni, or for the offering of the Vaiśvānara rice cake to Agni and the Maruts:

अग्निर्ज्योतिर्ज्योतिरग्निः स्वाहा । सूर्यो ज्योतिर्ज्योतिः सूर्यः स्वाहा ।
अग्निर्वर्चो ज्योतिर्वर्चः स्वाहा । सूर्यो वर्चो ज्योतिर्वर्चः स्वाहा ।
ज्योतिः सूर्यः सूर्यो ज्योतिः स्वाहा ॥

* * *

शुक्रज्योतिश्च चित्रज्योतिश्च सत्यज्योतिश्च ज्योतिष्माँश्च ।
शुक्रश्च ऋतपाश्चात्यंहाः ॥

YV III.9,XVII.80

Agni is light, and light is Agni. Hail! Sūrya is light, and light is Sūrya. Hail! Agni is splendour, light is splendour. Hail! Sūrya is splendour, light is splendour. Hail! Light is Sūrya, Sūrya is light. Hail!

Purely bright, wonderfully bright, really bright, all-luminous, bright, Law's protector, safe from ill. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

The laying down of bricks in the construction of the fire altar is a ritual process. The bricks called *retaḥsic* 'seed-pouring', *viśvajyotis* 'all-light' are placed with the respective formulæ:

विराड् ज्योतिरधारयत् । स्वराड् ज्योतिरधारयत् । प्रजापतिष्ट्वा सादयतु पृष्ठे पृथिव्या ज्योतिष्मतीम् । विश्वस्मै प्राणायापानाय व्यानाय विश्वं ज्योतिर्यच्छ... ।

YV XIII.24

The far-refulgent held the light. The self-refulgent held the light. Thee, luminous, may Prajāpati settle upon the back of Earth. Give, to all breathing, all the light, to out-breath, to diffusive breath. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

Mythic representations of light are occasionally found in the Vedic Saṃhitās. They are generally connected with the sun and his seven rays (ṚV I.105.9, II.5.2; AV VII.107.1), or with fire:

स्वयम्भूरसि श्रेष्ठो रश्मिर्वर्चोदा असि वर्चो मे देहि ।
सूर्यस्यावृतमन्वावर्ते ॥

* * *

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युक्त्वाय सविता देवान्त्स्वर्यतो धिया दिवम् । बृहज्ज्योतिः करिष्यतः
सविता प्र सुवाति तान् ॥

* * *

दिवि पृष्ठो अरोचताग्निर्वैश्वानरो बृहन् ।
क्ष्मया वृधान ओजसा चनोहितो ज्योतिषा बाधते तमः ॥

YV II.26, XI.3, XXXIII.92

Thou (the sun to which the sacrificer looks), noblest ray of light, art self-existent. Giver art thou of splendour. Give me splendour. I (the sacrificer) move along the path that Sūrya travels.

Savitar, having harnessed Gods who go to light and heavenly thought, who will create the lofty light – Savitar urge them on their way!

Agni Vaiśvānara, set in heaven, with mighty splendour hath shone forth, increasing in his power on earth, benevolent, he quells the darkness with his light. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

तदग्ने चक्षुः प्रति धेहि रेभे शफारुजो येन पश्यसि यातुधानान् ।
अथर्ववज्ज्योतिषा दैव्येन सत्यं धूर्वन्तमचितं न्योष ॥

* * *

वि ज्योतिषा बृहता भात्यग्निराविर्विश्वानि कृणुते महित्वा ।
प्रादेवीर्मायाः सहते दुरेवाः शिशीते शृङ्गे रक्षोभ्यो विनिक्ष्वे ॥

AV VIII.3.21,24

Lend thou the worshipper that eye, O Agni, wherewith thou lookest on the hoof armed demons.
With light celestial in Atharvan's manner burn up the fool who ruins truth with falsehood.

Agni shines far and wide with lofty splendour, and by his greatness makes all things apparent.
He conquers godless and malign enchantments, and sharpens both his horns to gore the ogres. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

The role of a Brāhmaṇa, such as the **Śatapatha**, is to connect the rituals with the texts and to explain them with the myths. Thus, for instance, the mixing of clarified butter in the *juhū* with *dhruvā* grass is explained by a *yajus* declaring the union of two lights in a way reminiscent of the above quoted *yajus* declaring the identity of the oblation and the fire:

स समनक्ति । सं ज्योतिषा ज्योतिरिति । ज्योतिर्वा इतरस्यामाज्यं भवति,
ज्योतिरितरस्याम् । ते ह्येतदुभे ज्योतिषी सङ्गच्छेते । तस्मादेवँ समनक्ति ॥

ŚBr I.4.5.7

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He (the sacrificer) mixes it, with the text 'Light with light' (YV II.9) for light (lustre), indeed, is the butter in the one (spoon) and light also is that in the other. Thereby these two lights unite with each other, and for this reason he mixes (the butter) in this manner. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

The same **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** gives a mythic explanation of the ritual of laying down the bricks called *viśvajyotis* for which the following *yajus* are uttered (YV XIII.24, *supra*):

तान्येतानि ज्योतींषि । तद्यदेता एवमुपदधात्येतान्येवैतज्ज्योतींषि सम्यञ्चि दधाति । तस्मादित ऊर्ध्वोऽग्निर्दीप्यतेऽर्वाङसावादित्यस्तपत्यन्तरिक्षेऽयं तिर्यङ् वायुः पवते ॥

ŚBr VIII.7.1.20

These (three, i.e. *agni, vāyu* and *āditya*) then are the lights; and when he (the sacrificer) lays down these (three *viśvajyotis* bricks) in this way, he thereby sets up those same lights so as to face each other; and hence the fire blazes upwards from this (earth) and yonder sun shines downwards, and that wind blows sideways in the air (atmosphere). (Tr. J. Eggeling)

The concept of light has been identified with the idea of the forces which create movements of intercommunication in the three parts of the world: vertical, upwards and downwards between heaven and earth and horizontal movement in the intermediary space.

The priest's honorarium (*dakṣiṇā*) in the form of gold is extolled as being light:

अयं वै ज्योतिर्य इदं तमोऽपावधीदिति । तस्माऽएतज्ज्योतिर्हिरण्यं दक्षिणामनयन् । ज्योतिर्हि हिरण्यम् ।

ŚBr IV.3.4.21

Thinking, "He indeed is the light who has dispelled this darkness", they brought him this light, gold, for a sacrificial gift, – for gold is indeed light. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

Another important concept, namely that of the Brāhmaṇic lustre, appears in the **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa**:

तेजो नाम ब्राह्मणं य एतस्य व्रतँ शक्नोति चरितुम् ॥

ŚBr II.4.2.6

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That is Brāhmaṇic lustre (*tejas*), when one knows to keep His (Prajāpati's) law. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

This is told in the context of *piṇḍapitṛyajña* or the oblation of obsequial cakes to the Fathers.

Lustre, generally designated by the word *tejas*, sometimes *varcas*, is one of the fruits of sacrifice. In the *agnihotra* sacrifice various materials are prescribed for the oblation to satisfy the differing desires of the sacrificer. For example, he should offer milk if he is desirous of heaven, barley-gruel if he wants to own a village and clarified butter if he is desirous of *tejas* in conformity with the afore-mentioned association of fire with that substance.

घृतेन तेजस्कामः ॥

KātŚrSū IV.15.25

The sacrificer, desirous of splendor (should offer the *agnihotra*) with the clarified butter. (Tr. H.G. Ranade)

पयसा जुहुयात् पशुकामस्य यवाग्वा ग्रामकामस्याज्येन तेजस्कामस्य दध्नेन्द्रियकामस्य तण्डुलैर्बलकामस्य ॥

VārŚrSū I.5.3.1

For the sacrificer who is desirous of animals, one should offer the *agnihotra* oblations with milk; for one who is desirous of a village, with barley-gruel; for one who is desirous of brilliance, with clarified butter; for one who is desirous of power with curds; and for one who is desirous of strength, with threshed rice-grains. (Tr. V.A. Kulkarny)

तेजः प्रातःसवन आत्मन्दधीतेन्द्रियं माध्यन्दिने सवने पशूँस्तृतीयसवन इति ।

BauŚrSū XIV.10

(The *adhvaryu*) should hold the splendour in his self in the morning session, the power in the mid-day session and the cattle in the third session. (Based on the tr. by V.A. Kulkarny)

The concepts of *tejas* and *jyotis* have also claimed the attention of the Upaniṣadic sages. *Tejas* plays a great role in the famous cosmological speculations of the **Chāndogya Upaniṣad**. The Primordial Unique Being has three aspects and colours, fire and red, water and white, solid food and black, a view which is a forerunner of the concept of the three *guṇas* (→*guṇa*). The three elements, fire, water and food are correlated with the three worlds, namely, heaven,

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intermediary space and earth, respectively. Each element has three aspects in the human body: fire is bone, marrow and speech, water is urine, blood and breath, food is excrement, flesh and mind. Creation is the successive production of each entity from the previous one. *Tejas* is the first element of the chain as it comes forth directly from the Supreme Being. It is conceived primarily as the procreative ardour of the supreme principle and is then materialized as a physical element.

तदैक्षत बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति । तत्तेजोऽसृजत । तत्तेज ऐक्षत । बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति । तदपोऽसृजत... ॥
ता आप ऐक्षन्त बह्व्यः स्याम प्रजायेमहीति ॥ ता अन्नमसृजन्त ...॥
यदु रोहितमिवाभूदिति तेजसस्तदूपमिति तद्विदांचक्रुः । यदु शुक्लमिवाभूदित्यपाँ रूपमिति तद्विदांचक्रुः । यदु कृष्णमिवाभूदित्यन्नस्य रूपमिति तद्विदांचक्रुः ॥
तेजोऽशितं त्रेधा विधीयते । तस्य यः स्थविष्ठो धातुस्तदस्थि भवति । यो मध्यमः स मज्जा । योऽणिष्ठः सा वाक् ॥

ChUp VI.2.3–4; 4.6; 5.3

It bethought itself: "Would that I were many! Let me procreate myself!" It emitted heat. That heat bethought itself: "Would that I were many! Let me procreate myself." It emitted water... That water bethought itself: "Would that I were many! Let me procreate myself." It emitted food... (Tr. R.E. Hume)

That which was as if red [to them], they knew it as the manifestation of *tejas;* that which was as if white they knew it as the manifestation of water; that which was as if black, they knew it as the manifestation of food.

The eaten *tejas* was divided in three parts; its gross element became the bones, the middle one became the marrow, the finest element became speech.

The immanence of God in the universe is explained by means of a famous Upaniṣadic simile for the *Brahman* which is compared to a fig-tree having its root above and its branches below (cf. KaṭhUp VI.1). In this representation *agni* is the element fire and *tejas* the brightness of the sun identified with the sacred syllable *Om*:

ऊर्ध्वमूलं त्रिपाद्ब्रह्म । शाखा आकाशवाय्वग्न्युदकभूम्यादया एकोऽश्वत्थनामा । एतद्ब्रह्म । एतस्यैतत् तेजो यदसा आदित्यः ... ॥

MaitUp VI.4

The three-quartered Brahma has its root above. Its branches are

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space, wind, fire, water, earth, and the like. This Brahma has the name of 'the Lone Fig-tree'. Belonging to It is the splendor which is yon sun. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

In a famous simile found in the same Upaniṣad, the sun is the honey extracted from the flower of the **Ṛgveda** by the bees who are the *ṛc*. Here the *tejas* of the sun is derived from the sacred speech:

ता वा एता ऋचः ॥
एतमृग्वेदमभ्यतपन् । तस्याभितप्तस्य यशस्तेज इन्द्रियं वीर्यमन्नाद्यँ रसोऽजायत ॥

ChUp III.1.2–3

Verily, these *Ṛc* verses brooded upon that Ṛgveda; from it, when it was brooded upon, there was produced as its essence splendor, brightness, power, vigour, and food. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

In the human person, when one experiences birth, life and death, *tejas* is vigour, rather than brightness:

पुरुषे ह वा अयमादितो गर्भो भवति यदेतद्रेतः । तदेतत् सर्वेभ्योऽङ्गेभ्यस्तेजः संभूतमात्मन्येवात्मानं बिभर्ति । तद्यदा स्त्रियां सिञ्चत्यथैनज्जनयति । तदस्य प्रथमं जन्म ॥

AitUp II.1

In a person (*puruṣa*), verily, this one becomes at first an embryo (*garbha*). That which is semen (*retas*), is the vigour (*tejas*) come together from all the limbs. In the self, indeed, one bears a self. When he pours this in a woman, then he begets it. This is one's first birth. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

श्वोभावा मर्त्यस्य यदन्तकैतत् सर्वेन्द्रियाणां जरयन्ति तेजः ॥
अपि सर्वं जीवितमल्पमेव तवैव वाहास्तव नृत्यगीते ॥

KaṭhUp I.26

Ephemeral things! That which is a mortal's, O End-maker'
Even the vigour (*tejas*) of all the powers, they wear away.
Even a whole life is slight indeed.
Thine be the vehicles (*vāha*)! Thine be the dance and song!
(Tr. R.E. Hume)

Tejas is the brilliance or force inherent in the vital breath and is identified with the sun or Lord of the celestial luminaries; thus *tejas* becomes *jyotis*:

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इन्द्रस्त्वं प्राण तेजसा रुद्रोऽसि परिरक्षिता ।
त्वमन्तरिक्षे चरसि सूर्यस्त्वं ज्योतिषां पतिः ॥

PrUp II.9

Indra art thou, O life, with thy brilliance!
Rudra art thou as a protector!
Thou movest in the atmosphere
As the sun, thou Lord of lights! (Tr. R.E. Hume)

In a prayer to the sun, *tejas* is its brilliance, into which a dying person wishes to merge himself. Here Śaṅkara explains *tejas* as being *jyotis*:

तेजो यत्ते रूपं कल्याणतमं तत्ते पश्यामि ।
योऽसावसौ पुरुषः सोऽहमस्मि ॥

ĪśUp 16

Gather thy brilliance! What is thy fairest form– that of thee I see.
He who is yonder, yonder Person– I myself am he! (Tr. R.E. Hume)

Tejas, element and light, is a privileged component of the human person as the seat of the self (*ātman*) and the sign by which one can recognize and demonstrate the existence of the self:

यस्तेजसि तिष्ठँस्तेजसोऽन्तरो यं तेजो न वेद यस्य तेजः शरीरं यस्तेजोऽन्तरो यमयत्येष त आत्मान्तर्याम्यमृतः इत्यधिदैवतम् ॥

BṛUp III.7.14

He who, dwelling in the light, yet is other than the light, whom the light does not know, whose body the light is, who controls the light from within– He is your Soul, the Inner Controller, the Immortal. Thus far with reference to the divinities. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The word *jyotis* in the Upaniṣads has the same semantic value as *tejas*. However, it does not seem to retain the idea of vigour. It is essentially light. It is considered to exist at several levels. It exists at the level of the real observable entity of this world, for instance as the sun, or at the level of supernatural entities upto *Brahman*. A great Upaniṣadic thought is the identity of both, inner, higher and the outer, lower light.

अथ यदतः परो दिवो ज्योतिर्दीप्यते विश्वतःपृष्ठेषु सर्वतःपृष्ठेष्वनुत्तमेषूत्तमेषु लोकेष्विदं वाव तद्यदिदमस्मिन्नन्तः पुरुषे ज्योतिः ॥

ChUp III.13.7

Now the light which shines higher than this heaven, on the backs

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of all, on the backs of everything, in the highest world, than which there are no higher– verily that is the same as this light which is here within a person. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The immanence of God in the world and in each individual is expressed by declaring the presence of light (*jyotis*) in the four elements and the four organs of man:

तदेतच्चतुष्पाद् ब्रह्म । वाक्पादः प्राणः पादःचक्षुः पादः श्रोत्रं पादः । इत्यध्यात्मम् । अथाधिदैवतमग्निः पादो वायुः पाद आदित्यः पादो दिशः पादः । इत्युभयमेवादिष्टं भवत्यध्यात्मं चैवाधिदैवतं च ॥
वागेव ब्रह्मणश्चतुर्थः पादः । सोऽग्निना ज्योतिषा भाति च तपति च । भाति च तपति च कीर्त्या यशसा ब्रह्मवर्चसेन य एवं वेद ॥
प्राण एव ब्रह्मणश्चतुर्थः पादः । स वायुना ज्योतिषा भाति च तपति च । भाति च तपति च कीर्त्या यशसा ब्रह्मवर्चसेन य एवं वेद ॥
चक्षुरेव ब्रह्मणश्चतुर्थः पादः । स आदित्येन ज्योतिषा भाति च तपति च । भाति च तपति च कीर्त्या यशसा ब्रह्मवर्चसेन य एवं वेद ॥
श्रोत्रमेव ब्रह्मणश्चतुर्थः पादः । स दिग्भिर्ज्योतिषा भाति च तपति च । भाति च तपति च कीर्त्या यशसा ब्रह्मवर्चसेन य एवं वेद ॥

ChUp III.18.2–6

That *Brahma* has four quarters. One quarter is speech. One quarter is breath. One quarter is the eye. One quarter is the ear. – Thus with reference to the self. Now with reference to the divinities. – One quarter is Agni (Fire). One quarter is Vāyu (Wind). One quarter is Āditya (the Sun). One quarter is the quarters of heaven. – This is the twofold instruction with reference to the self and with reference to the divinities.

Speech, truly, is a fourth part of Brahma. It shines and glows with Agni as its light. He shines and glows with fame, with splendor, and with eminence in sacred knowledge who knows this.

Breath, truly, is a fourth part of Brahma. It shines and glows with Vāyu as its light. He shines and glows with fame, with splendor, and with eminence in sacred knowldge who knows this.

The eye, truly, is a fourth part of Brahma. It shines and glows with Āditya as its light. He shines and glows with fame, with splendor, and with eminence in sacred knowledge who knows this.

The ear, truly, is a fourth part of Brahma. It shines and glows with the quarters of heaven as its light. He shines and glows with fame, with splendor, and with eminence in sacred knowledge who knows this – yea, who knows this! (Tr. R.E. Hume)

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The supreme light is the self and the supreme *Brahman*:

> अथ य एष संप्रसादोऽस्माच्छरीरात्समुत्थाय परं ज्योतिरुपसंपद्य स्वेन रूपेणाभिनिष्पद्यत एष आत्मेति होवाच । एतदमृतमभयमेतद् ब्रह्मेति ... ॥
>
> ChUp VIII.3.4
>
> Now, that serene one (i.e. the soul in deep sleep) who, rising up out of this body, reaches the highest light and appears with his own form– 'he is the Soul (*Ātman*)', said he [i.e. the teacher]. 'That is the immortal, the fearless. That is Brahma.' (Tr. R.E. Hume)

At the same time, *jyotis* continues to be a name for the celestial luminaries:

> चन्द्रमसा वाव सर्वाणि ज्योतींषि महीयन्ते ... ॥
>
> TUp I.5
>
> Verily, all lights are made greater by the moon. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The Lord, whom the **Śvetāśvatara** introduces with the name and features of Śiva, is said to be light:

> महान् प्रभुर्वै पुरुषः सत्त्वस्यैष प्रवर्तकः ।
> सुनिर्मलामिमां प्राप्तिमीशानो ज्योतिरव्ययः ॥
>
> ŚvUp III.12
>
> A mighty lord (*prabhu*) is the Person,
> The instigator of the highest being unto the purest attainment,
> The ruler, a light imperishable! (Tr. R.E. Hume)

Elsewhere *Brahman* is identified as having two forms, one unreal which has a solid form, one real which has no solid form. This one is light, like sunlight:

> यदमूर्तं तत्सत्यम् । तद्ब्रह्म तज्ज्योतिः । यज्ज्योतिः स आदित्यः । स वा एष ओमित्येतदात्मा ... ॥
>
> MaitUp VI.3
>
> That which is the formless is real, is Brahma, is light. That light is the same as the sun. Verily, that came to have *Om* as its soul. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

With this background in the Vedic literature and the oldest Upaniṣads, the concepts implicit in the words *tejas*, *jyotis* and *prakāśa* were developed in three major directions. These were the concept of fire as a material element, the

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concept of light as brilliance and effulgence, the concept of light as knowledge. In classical Sanskrit the words *tejas* and *jyotis* refer to the element, fire, the former more often than the latter. The three words occur frequently to refer to all aspects of light and share this meaning with a great number of other words. Just as they denote light, the three words can be used metaphorically to connote knowledge. In this connotation the word *jyotis* does occur sometimes, but the most frequently used word is *prakāśa.*

The Concept of the Material Element Fire (*tejas, jyotis*)

Tejas as a designation of the element fire (→*agni*) is abundantly documented, starting from Buddhist Pali Scriptures:

> कतमं तं रूपं तेजोधातु? यं तेजो तेजोगतं, उस्मा उस्मागतं, उसुमं उसुमागतं, अज्झत्तं वा बहिद्धा वा, उपादिण्णं वा अनुपादिण्णं वा – इदं तं रूपं तेजोधातु ।
>
> DhSaṅ p.226
>
> What is that form which is flame-element (or fire, light, heat etc.)? That which is flame, belonging to flame, heat, belonging to heat, hot, belonging to hot. Whether it be of the self, or external or the issue of grasping or not the issue of grasping. (Tr. Rhys Davids)

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school currently uses the word *tejas* with reference to the element fire. Indeed, in the Darśanas this word seems to be preferred rather than the direct designation, *agni*, or its synonyms, *vahni*, etc. This designation is particularly meaningful. The concept includes not only the fire which burns, but also the heat, the light which irradiates, natural luminous bodies such as the stars, lightning, and even gold. Light is conceived to be an element of matter, not a mere property of fire. A ray of light is something material. And all kinds of shining are conceived to be irradiating from their source and projected into the surroundings.

An early physical view of fire is that it is the substance of the sun and that the fire on earth originates from the sun. Patañjali declares that this is a generally accepted fact and uses it as an example of the affinity between two entities. His late commentator, Nāgeśabhaṭṭa (17–18th century A. D.) supports this view with an additional argument. He also remarks that in the **Mahābhāṣya** the word *jyotis* is used only with reference to the celestial luminaries. Moreover, in the following passage it refers specifically to the sun.

> तथा-ज्योतिषो विकारोऽर्चिराकाशदेशे निवाते सुप्रज्वलितं नैव तिर्यग्गच्छति, नार्वागवरोहति । ज्योतिषो विकारो ज्योतिरेव गच्छत्यान्तर्यतः ॥

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अत एव दावाग्नेर्मध्याह्नादौ सूर्यकरसंपर्कात् क्रौर्यातिशयो दृश्यते ।

Mahābh I.1.50 with Nāgeśa's Uddyota

A flame is a modification of the sun. When it is blazing well and in a place without wind it does not move horizontally; it does not bend downwards. A modification of the sun goes towards the sun, on account of their close relationship.

That is why a forest fire is observed to be most violent at noon etc. because of its contact with the sun's rays.

The **Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra** defines *tejas* as that which has the properties of touch and colour, hot touch being its characteristic feature (VaiśSū II.1.3, 2.4; see also Bh on BrSū II.2.16). The notions elaborated in that school are summarized by Annaṃbhaṭṭa as follows:

उष्णस्पर्शवत्तेजः । तद्विविधम् । नित्यमनित्यं च । नित्यं परमाणु रूपम् । अनित्यं कार्यरूपम् । पुनस्त्रिविधं शरीरेन्द्रियविषयभेदात् । शरीरमादित्यलोके । इन्द्रियं रूपग्राहकं चक्षुः कृष्णताराग्रवर्ति । विषयः चतुर्विधः । भौमदिव्यौदर्याकरजभेदात् । भौमं वह्न्यादिकम् । अबिन्धनं दिव्यं विद्युदादि । भुक्तस्य परिणामहेतुरौदार्यम् । आकरजं सुवर्णादि ॥

TarkSaṅg 12

Tejas has hot touch. It is of two sorts, eternal and non-eternal. The eternal is atomic, the non-eternal is a product. It is again threefold, owing to the division into body, sense-organ and object. The body is in the world of the sun. The sense-organ is the sight which grasps colour and resides in the fore part of the pupil of the eye. The object is fourfold, earthy, heavenly, gastric and mineral. The earthy object is fire and the like; the heavenly one is lightning etc. having watery fuel; the gastric one is the cause of the transformation of things eaten; the mineral one is gold and the like. (Based on the tr. by M.R. Bodas)

The properties of *tejas* are not always perceptible. Vātsyāyana describes different situations:

उद्भूतरूपस्पर्शं प्रत्यक्षं तेजः, यथा – आदित्यरश्मयः । उद्भूतरूपमनुद्भूत स्पर्शं च प्रत्यक्षं तेजः, यथा– प्रदीपरश्मयः । उद्भूतस्पर्शमनुद्भूतरूपम-प्रत्यक्षम्, यथा– अबादिसंयुक्तं तेजः । अनुद्भूतरूपस्पर्शोऽप्रत्यक्षश्चाक्षुषो रश्मिरिति ।

NyBh III.1.39

Light possesses a diverse character. Sometimes it is visible with both

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colour and touch manifest, as in the case of the sun's rays. In some cases it is visible with its colour manifest and touch unmanifest, as in the case of the rays of light from a lamp. In some cases it is not visible but its touch is manifest and colour unmanifest, as in the case of light in contact with heated water and such other things. In some cases both colour and touch are unmanifest and as such are not perceptible, for example the light rays emanating from the eye. (Based on the tr. by G.N. Jha)

The Mīmāṃsakas conceived gold and other minerals as a particular category of substances. The Vaiśeṣikas tried to demonstrate that they are not made of the element earth, nor do they belong to a separate category but are made of *tejas*. Their fiery nature is a regular topic for debate in this school.

According to the Sāṃkhya school of thought the element *tejas* has three properties, namely, colour, touch and sound, in so far as it is derived from the *tanmātra* of colour and those of sound and touch (Vācaspati Miśra's TaKau on SāṃKā 22), or as the **Yuktidīpikā** presents it:

शब्दस्पर्शरूपगुणादूपतन्मात्रात् त्रिगुणं तेजः ।... [स्पर्शः] तेजस उष्णः, रूपं च शुक्लं भास्वरं च तेजसः... ।

YuDīp on SāṃKā 38

Fire possesses three attributes and proceeds from the *rūpa tanmātra* which is endowed with the attributes of sound, touch and colour... Fire is hot to the touch; its colour is dazzling white. (Tr. R.S Bhattacharya)

The **Yuktidīpikā** also enumerates other properties which differentiate fire (here called *jyotis*) from earth and water:

ऊर्ध्वगं पावकं दग्धृ पाचकं लघुभास्वरम् ।
प्रध्वंस्योजस्विता ज्योतिः पूर्वाभ्यां सविलक्षणम् ॥

YuDīp on SāṃKā 38

Fire has the following characteristics different from those of the previous two elements: it is tending upwards, purifying, burning, cooking, it is light, dazzling, destructive and yielding strength. (Tr. R.S. Bhattacharya)

Epic and Purāṇic literature contains views closely related to those of the Sāṃkhya, although occasionally one does find original ideas. The **Mahābhārata** has something to say about *rūpa* which is one of the three properties of the element fire (*jyotis*):

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शब्दः स्पर्शश्च रूपं च त्रिगुणं ज्योतिरुच्यते ।
ज्योतिः पश्यति रूपाणि रूपं च बहुधा स्मृतम् ॥
ह्रस्वो दीर्घस्तथा स्थूलश्चतुरस्रोऽणु वृत्तवान् ।
शुक्लः कृष्णस्तथा रक्तो नीलः पीतोऽरुणस्तथा ।
एवं द्वादशविस्तारो ज्योतीरूपगुणः स्मृतः ॥

MBh XII.177.31–32

Sound, touch and form are the three properties of light. One perceives light, as forms. Form is of various kinds: short, long, thick, square, atomic, round, white, black, red, blue, yellow and reddish. Thus the property *rūpa* belonging to light has a twelvefold extension. (Based on the tr. by M.N. Dutt)

Note the expression '*jyotiḥ paśyati rūpāṇi*' which literally means 'one sees light, i.e. forms' (cf. in the same passage the expression *jyotiḥ paśyati cakṣurbhyām* 'one sees light with the eyes'). *Jyotis* here refers to the element fire, which is not directly perceptible, as are its properties, *rūpas*. Thus six forms and six colours are classified under one and the same head as *rūpa*. This word seems to refer to a concept more general than colour, namely to the whole sensible configuration, shape and colour of the perceived object. Similarly, the **Bhāgavata Purāṇa** presents a general and abstract view of the properties of *tejas*:

द्रव्याकृतित्वं गुणता व्यक्तिसंस्थात्वमेव च ।
तेजस्त्वं तेजसः साध्वि रूपमात्रस्य वृत्तयः ॥
द्योतनं पचनं पानमदनं हिममर्दनम् ।
तेजसो वृत्तयस्त्वेताः शोषणं क्षुत्तृडेव च ॥

BhāgPur III.26.39–40

To give a form to substance, to be an attribute of it, and to have the same spatial relation as the substance (in which it inheres) form the special properties as well as the functions of *tejas* which is constituted of the subtle principle of colour. O virtuous mother; these are the effects of *tejas* viz., to give light, to cook (food), to absorb, to intoxicate, to destroy cold, and to dry things, as well as to cause hunger and thirst. (Tr. S. Subbarao)

The process of creation is an important theme in the Purāṇas which contain many references to the evolution of the elements (→*sṛṣṭi–sthiti–pralaya*, Vol.IV). In conformity with the Sāṃkhya view they say that *tejas* is derived from the corresponding *tanmātra* (subtle element). The element is said to be derived from the previous element in the series beginning with sound, or else

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each element produces the next *tanmātra* which goes on to produce the corresponding element.

वायोरपि विकुर्वाणात् कालकर्मस्वभावतः ।
उदपद्यत तेजो वै रूपवत्स्पर्शशब्दवत् ॥

BhāgPur II.5.27

Out of *vāyu* undergoing change under the force of Time, *karma* (*adṛṣṭa*) and Nature, was produced *tejas* (fire) with the special attribute of colour, and with the qualities of touch and sound (derived from the inherent causes *ākāśa* and *vāyu*). (Tr. S. Subba Rau)

वायोश्च स्पर्शतन्मात्रादूपं दैवेरितादभूत् ।
समुत्थितं ततस्तेजश्चक्षूरूपोपलम्भनम् ॥

BhāgPur III.26.38

Out of *vāyu*, characterised by the subtle principle of touch and thrown into (modifying) activity was evolved colour (form) and out of it *tejas* (fire); and the eye is the means of apprehending colour. (Tr. S. Subba Rau)

(See also ViPur I.2.40b–41a, MatPur III.24b–25a, Manu I.77)

At the time of the dissolution of the world the process of creation is reversed and each element in the series is said to merge in the next above it.

ततश्चापो हृतरसा ज्योतिषं प्राप्नुवन्ति वै ।

ViPur VI.4.18ab

Deprived of the essential rudiment of flavour, they [the waters] become one with fire. (Tr. Wilson)

ज्योतिषोऽपि गुणं रूपं वायुर्ग्रसति भास्वरम् ।

AgPur 368.21ab

(At the time of dissolution) wind swallows the luminous colour which is the property of fire.

Tāntric literature has largely drawn its conception of the elements from Sāṃkhya, with occasional variations or additions. For instance, the process of creation of fire from the *tanmātra* colour which is derived from *ahaṃkāra* (ego) is described as follows:

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Figure 26: *Sudarśana Mahāyantra*: Srirangam

तामसादथ भूतादेः सुदर्शनसमीरितात् ।
जायते रूपमात्रं तु ज्योतिस्तस्माच्च रूपवत् ॥
रूपं व्यक्तिस्तथा पाकः कान्तिर्दीप्तिरितीदृशाः ।
जायन्ते तैजसा भेदा भेदाद्वैकारिकात्तथा ॥

AhSam VII.30–31

From the ego (*bhūtādi*) with prominence of *tamas* under the impulse of Sudarśana the *tanmātra* colour is born from which light evolves endowed with colour. Colour, manifestation, ripening, beauty and luminosity, such qualities are born from the altered *taijasa* (ego).

त्रिगुणोऽग्निः स्ववीर्येण रूपेणातीवशोभिना ।
शब्दस्पर्शसमायोगात्तत्तेजः पक्तिलक्षणम् ॥

स च रूपेण प्रथिव्यादिविलक्षणेन प्रकाशस्वभावेन स्पर्शेन चौष्ण्यादिना धमधमादिना च शब्देन योगात् त्रिगुणोऽग्निः स्वेन कारणात्मना वीर्येण । न तु संसर्गवशात्तस्य

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ते गुणा इत्यर्थः । तच्च तस्य रूपं तेजोलक्षणं प्रकाशकं दिव्यं भौममाकरजं हिरण्यात्मकमिति त्रिविधम् । औदरं पुनः पक्तिलक्षणमेव । न तु प्रकाशात्मकम् ॥

MPĀ vp XXI.2 with Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha's *Vṛtti*

Fire has three properties by virtue of its power, form and intense beauty. In union with touch and sound, it is fire (*tejas*) which is characterized by [the action] of cooking.

Fire, by virtue of *rūpa* which is different from the colour made of earth etc., the nature of which is light, in union with touch, i.e. heat etc. and sound, i.e. '*dhamadhama* ...' has three properties, and also by virtue of its proper *vīrya* which is its material cause (i.e. the *rūpatanmātra*); the idea is that it does not have these properties due to a contact with other entities (they belong to its own stuff). And this *rūpa* is characterized by light, i.e. illuminates; it is of three kinds, celestial, terrestrial, mineral such as gold. There is also a fire *audara* 'belonging to the stomach' characterized by the action of cooking, but not made of light.

The Āyurvedic system of Indian medicine conceives the element fire to be a major component of the human body and to have several specific physiological functions. Although the fire in the body is called *tejas* or *jyotis*, as well as *agni* and its synonyms, a technical term, namely *pitta*, has also been coined.

तस्य पुरुषस्य पृथिवी मूर्तिः, आपः क्लेदः, तेजोऽभिसंतापः, वायुः प्राणः, वियत् सुषिराणि... ॥ पञ्चेन्द्रियद्रव्याणि – खं वायुर्ज्योतिरापो भूरिति ॥

CarSam ŚāSthā V.5, SūSthā VIII.9

In man's body the element earth is the solid part, water is the liquid components, fire is the heat, wind is the breath, space is the hollow parts...

The substances (which constitute) the five sense organs are space, wind, fire, water and earth (i.e. sight is made of the element fire which is called *jyotis* etc.).

तैजसास्तु – रूपं रूपेन्द्रियं वर्णः संतापो भ्राजिष्णुता पक्तिरमर्षस्तैक्ष्ण्यं शौर्यं च... ।

SuSam ŚāSthā I.19

The properties of *tejas* are (manifest in) form, sight, colour, heat, brightness, digestion, anger, harshness and valour.

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The fire in the body retains some of its common properties, like heat. It also has new ones and is characterized by five functions. In accord with these functions, the bodily fire is given five names: *pācaka, rañjaka, sādhaka, ālocaka* and *bhrājaka*. The *pācaka* fire digests food in the stomach, increases the strength of the other fires and separates the essence (*rasa*) of the digested food from the excrements. It has a primary role.

आयुर्वर्णो बलं स्वास्थ्यमुत्साहोपचयौ प्रभा ।
ओजस्तेजोऽग्नयः प्राणाश्चोक्ता देहाग्निहेतुकाः ॥
शान्तेऽग्नौ म्रियते, युक्ते चिरं जीवत्यनामयः ।
रोगी स्याद्विकृते, मूलमग्निस्तस्मान्निरुच्यते ॥

CarSam CikSthā XV.3–4

Life-span, complexion, strength, health, enthusiasm, corpulence, lustre, immunity, energy, heat processes and vital breath – all these depend on body-fire. One dies if this fire is extinguished, lives long, free from disorders if it is functioning properly, gets illed if it is deranged, hence Agni (the digestive fire) is the root cause of all. (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

The *rañjaka* fire gives a red colour to the essence of the digested food leading to the formation of blood:

रञ्जितास्तेजसा त्वापः शरीरस्थेन देहिनाम् ।
अव्यापन्नाः प्रसन्नेन रक्तमित्यभिधीयते ॥

SuSam SūSthā XIV.5

The healthy water (which is the *rasa* or essence of the digested food), coloured by the normal (*rañjaka*) fire located in the body of living beings, is called 'blood'.

The *sādhaka* fire is situated in the heart and helps the functioning of psychological functions, such as desire, thought and memory.

The *ālocaka* fire is located in the eye and helps it to grasp colour and form (*rūpa*).

तेजोजलाश्रितं बाह्यं तेष्वन्यत् पिशिताश्रितम् ।

अत्र तेजःशब्देनालोचकतेजःसमाश्रयं सिरागतं रक्तं बोद्धव्यम् ।

SuSam Uttaratantra I.18ab with Dalhaṇa's Comm.

The external [coat (*paṭala*) of the eye] supports *tejas* and water, the other one supports flesh.

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Here *tejas* means venous blood containing *ālocaka* (visual) *pitta*.
(Tr. P.V. Sharma)

The *bhrājaka* fire produces a lustrous complexion and processes the ointments applied to the skin. Its action is described with the image of cooking. Fire (*jyotis*) is said to play a role, along with wind, in the growth of the fœtus:

तस्यान्तरेण नाभेस्तु ज्योतिःस्थानं ध्रुवं स्मृतम् ।
तदा धमति वातस्तु देहस्तेनास्य वर्धते ॥

SuSam ŚāSthā IV.58

The seat of fire is well established as being inside the navel of the [fœtus]. Then when the wind (of the vital breath) blows, its body grows by virtue of this [fire].

According to Āyurvedic medicine, disease is caused by the loss of the normal balance between the three main physiological constituents. Each one has its properties which can counterbalance those of the others. When one or several constituents have an excessive activity, they can be 'calmed down' by the properties of substances made of the other constituents. Fire has the following properties:

सस्नेहमुष्णं तीक्ष्णं च द्रवमम्लं सरं कटु ।
विपरीतगुणैः पित्तं द्रव्यैराशु प्रशाम्यति ॥

CarSam SūSthā I.60

Fire (*pitta*) is unctuous, hot, sharp, liquid, acid, fluid and pungent. It is quickly allayed by substances of opposite qualities.

भूतेजोवारिजैर्द्रव्यैः शमं याति समीरणः ।
* * *
खतेजोऽनिलजैः श्लेष्मा शममेति शरीरिणाम् ।

SuSam SūSthā XLI.7ab, 8ab

Wind is allayed by substances derived from earth, fire and water. The phlegm (*śleṣman*) of living beings is pacified by substances derived from space, fire and wind.

Jaina literature has developed concepts of the human body which, although not purely medical, owe a lot to classical Āyurveda. The organism to which the transmigrating soul is bound is a composite structure made of five bodies. The physical body, made of flesh etc., is called *audārika* and the constituent matter of the other four is progressively subtler. These bodies are as follows. The first

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is called *vaikriya*, transformable at will and belonging to celestial beings. The next is *āhāraka*, which can be moved far away from the physical body. The *taijasa* body is made of fire and power. It brings about digestion on the one hand and gives lustre to the body. Lastly comes the *kārmaṇa* body which is produced by previous acts.

औदारिकवैक्रियाऽऽहारकतैजसकार्मणानि शरीराणि ॥

TaSū II.37

The bodies are the physical, the transformable, the transferable, that made of fire and the one made of *karman*.

The Concept of Light

The common Indian notions of the nature of light are integrated into those of the material element fire. But it is also conceived independently, in which case it is described and analysed as a property of the object made of the element fire. However, the fact that the light of the sun can be conceived independently from the sun itself does not invalidate the idea that both are the material elemental fire. Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja refer to the relationship between them to illustrate the idea that difference and non-difference are not absolutely mutually exclusive:

प्रकाशाश्रयवद्वा तेजस्त्वात् ॥

यथा प्रकाशः सावित्रस्तदाश्रयश्च सविता नात्यन्तभिन्नौ, उभयोरपि तेजस्त्वाविशेषात् ।

BrSū III.2.28 with ŚBh

Or else like that of light to its substratum, both being fire.

The light of the sun and the sun which supports it are not absolutely different, because they do not differ as far as their nature as fire is concerned.
(Tr. G. Thibaut)

ब्रह्मस्वरूपस्यैवाचिदूपेणावस्थाने भेदश्रुतयः, ब्रह्मणोऽपरिणामित्ववादिन्योऽपि बाधिता भवेयुः । अतो यथा तेजस्त्वेन प्रभातदाश्रययोरपि तादात्म्यम्, एवमचित्प्रपञ्चस्य ब्रह्मणो रूपत्वमित्यर्थः ।

ŚrīBh III.2.28

If Brahman itself only appeared in the form of non-sentient things – as the snake itself only constitutes the coils – both sets of texts,

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those which declare difference as well as those which declare the unchangeableness of Brahman, would be contrary to sense. We, therefore, adopting the second alternative, hold that the case under discussion is analogous to that of light and that in which it abides, i.e. the luminous body. The two are different, but at the same time they are identical in so far as they both are fire (*tejas*). In the same way the non-sentient world constitutes the form of Brahman.
(Tr. G. Thibaut)

The light of the celestial luminaries, among which the sun and moon are most prominent, are thus often described merely as their attribute, or a specific essence, and not as their common basic element.

यद्धि यस्मिन् सति भवति, असति च न भवति, तत् तद्धर्मत्वेनाध्यवसीयते, यथाऽग्निधर्मौ औष्ण्यप्रकाशौ ... ॥

ŚBh on BrSū III.3.53

For wherever something exists if some other thing exists, and does not exist if that other thing does not exist, we determine the former thing to be a mere quality of the latter; light and heat, e.g. we determine to be the qualities of fire. (Tr. G. Thibaut)

Light appears as the main factor in a Jaina classification of heavenly beings and celestial bodies in four groups, *bhavanapati, vyantara, jyotiṣka* and *vaimānika*. The *jyotiṣka* group resides in the *jyotiṣa* or luminous celestial quarters, moves around the mountain Meru and determines the division of time such as a *muhūrta*, day and night, fortnight, month etc.:

ज्योतिष्काः सूर्याश्चन्द्रमसो ग्रहनक्षत्रप्रकीर्णतारकाश्च ॥

TaSū IV.13

The *jyotiṣka* group (*nikāya*) consists of Sūrya (sun), Candra (moon), Graha (planets), Nakṣatra (constellations) and Prakīrṇatārā (stray stars). (Tr. K.K. Dixit)

The light of the celestial luminaries is subject to change and can be diversely qualified:

माध्यन्दिनोल्काप्रकाशो नोपलभ्यते आदित्यप्रकाशेनाभिभूतः ।

NyBh III.1.42

Light of the stars is not perceived at mid-day, because it is suppressed by the (fierce) light of the sun. (Based on the tr. by G.N. Jha)

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स्थानविशेषात्प्रकाशादिवत् ॥

BrSū III.2.34

(The statements concerning connexion and difference) are due to difference of place; in the manner of light and so on (i.e. we speak of light inside a chamber and light outside it, though in reality light is one, the distinctions being due to limiting adjuncts). (Tr. G. Thibaut)

यथा च प्रकाश एकस्यापि सवितुरमेध्यदेशसंबद्धः परिह्रियते नेतरः शुचिभूमिष्ठः ।

BrSūŚBh II.3.48

The sun is one only, yet we shun only that part of this light which shines on unholy places, and not the part which falls on pure ground. (Tr. G. Thibaut)

अग्निर्ज्योतिरहः शुक्लः षण्मासा उत्तरायणम् ।
तत्र प्रयाता गच्छन्ति ब्रह्म ब्रह्मविदो जनाः ॥
धूमो रात्रिस्तथा कृष्णः षण्मासा दक्षिणायनम् ।
तत्र चान्द्रमसं ज्योतिर्योगी प्राप्य निवर्तते ॥

BhG VIII.24–25

Fire, light, day, (the moon's) bright (fortnight), the six months of the (sun's) northern course – dying in these to Brahman do they go, the men who Brahman know. Smoke, night, (the moon's) dark (fortnight), the six months of the (sun's) southern course, – dying in these a yogin wins the light of the moon, and back he comes again. (Based on the tr. by R.C. Zaehner)

The consideration of the nature of light emphasizes the function of illuminating things and helping the activity of the sense of sight. In contrast with light, darkness can be defined by opposite qualities and functions, namely those which prevent visual perception.

सर्वस्यैवास्य नामरूपक्रियाकारकफलजातस्य याभिव्यक्तिः सा ब्रह्मज्योतिःसत्तानिमित्ता । यथा सूर्यादिज्योतिः सत्तानिमित्ता सर्वस्य रूपजातस्याभिव्यक्तिस्तद्वत् ।

BrSūŚBh I.3.22

The manifestation of the whole class of names, forms, actions, factors and results of action, is caused by the existence of the light of *Brahman*, just as the manifestation of the whole class of forms and

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colours is caused by the existence of the light of the sun and other luminaries.

तमो ज्योतिरिति हीमौ शब्दौ परस्परप्रतिद्वन्द्विविषयौ प्रसिद्धौ । चक्षुर्वृत्तेर्निरोधकं शार्वरादिकं तम उच्यते । तस्या एवानुग्राहकमादित्यादिकं ज्योतिः ।

BrSūŚBh I.1.24

The common use of language, he says, teaches us that the two words 'light' and 'darkness' denote mutually opposite things, darkness being the term for whatever interferes with the function of the sense of sight, as, for instance, the gloom of the night, while sun-shine and whatever else favours the action of the eye is called light. (Tr. G. Thibaut)

There are two opposite views about darkness. The Naiyāyikas define it as the absence of light, while the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsakas, Sāṃkhyas and some Vedāntins consider it to be a substance made of earth which is perceived by the eye. This is a perception in which light is not required, whereas in the visual perception of other objects light is necessary. An interesting remark of the **Yuktidīpikā** includes shadow (→*chāyā*) as a part of *tamas*. The function of the *sattva*, on the contrary, is to shed light (*prakāśa*). The activity of *sattva* consists in overpowering *tamas*:

प्रकाशस्तु पृथिवीधर्मस्य च्छायालक्षणस्य तमसस्तिरस्कारेण द्रव्यान्तरप्रकाशनम् ।

YuDīp on SāṃKā 13 p.60

Light (*prakāśa*) is the illumination of other objects by suppressing darkness which is a shadow and a property of earth.

Luminous objects are not limited to celestial bodies. The sky itself is considered to have a light of his own, which is transferred to the ocean (MBh I.19.66). Mount Meru is made of gold which is essentially fire, and his luminosity is praised:

तस्य मध्ये स्थितः शैलराजराजो हिरण्मयः ॥
तिरस्कृतांशुमज्ज्योतिर्मेरुः सुरनिषेवितः ।

MṛgĀ vp XIII.41cd–42ab

In the middle of Jambudvīpa there stands Meru, the Lord of the lords of mountains, made of gold. By its brightness it has defeated (even) the sun. It is inhabited by the gods.

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In a myth of creation the world is said to emerge from a golden egg, which is accordingly called *taijasa* 'made of *tejas*' (BṛSam I.6). Indeed, mythology is rich with images of light and radiancy is often ascribed to supernatural entities. For example, the weapon called *brahmāstra*, used by Aśvatthāman and Arjuna is said to be made of *tejas*.

किमिदं स्वित्कुतो वेति देवदेव न वेद्म्यहम् ।
सर्वतोमुखमायाति तेजःपरमदारुणम् ॥

BhāgPur I.7.26

What is this? Where does it come from? O Lord of lords, I do not know. A supremely terrible light comes and (encompasses me) all around.

Among the numerous words that mean 'light', *tejas* generally refers to an intense, dangerous or devastating type of light:

तत्रैवं तपतस्तस्य महत्तेजो विनिःसृतम् ।
शिरसः सर्वसंसर्पि महोपद्रवकृन्मुने ॥

ŚPur II.3.15.29

(Brahmā said:) O sage, in the process of such a penance, a huge mass of light shot up from his (Tāraka's) head and spread all round. It caused great havoc. (Tr. J.L. Shastri)

Another important aspect of the symbolism of light is related to the effort to show the immanence of God in the world. Light appears to be one of the most important images used to represent the nature of God. The dynamic aspect of light, the flame of fire is an image of God's nature thought of as energy (*śakti*). In this case, *tejas* is the preferred word for light. The static, serene aspect is denoted by the word *jyotis*, used in its sense of shining:

पुण्यो गन्धः पृथिव्यां च तेजश्चास्मि विभावसौ ।
जीवनं सर्वभूतेषु तपश्चास्मि तपस्विषु ॥
* * *
यद्यद्विभूतिमत्सत्त्वं श्रीमदूर्जितमेव वा ।
तत्तदेवावगच्छ त्वं मम तेजोंऽशसंभवम् ॥

BhG VII.9, X.41

Pure fragrance in the earth am I, flame's onset in the fire: (and) life am I in all contingent beings, in ascetics (their) fierce austerity... Whatever being shows wide power, prosperity or strength, be sure that this derives from (but) a fragment of my glory. (Tr. R.C. Zaehner)

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स्रष्टा त्वमेव लोकानां संहर्ता चापराजितः ।
त्वं ज्योतिः सर्वभूतानां त्वमादित्यो विभावसुः ॥

MBh I.21.11

You are the creator of the worlds and their destroyer! You are unconquered! You are the light of all creatures, you are Āditya, you are Vibhāvasu. (Tr. P.C. Roy)

तद्वीर्यापूरितं सर्वं मम तेजोपबृंहितम् ।

NT I.32ab

Everything is filled with my power (*vīrya*) and invigorated by my ardour (*tejas*).

Commenting on this line, Kṣemarāja says in the context of Kashmir Śaiva thought, that power (*vīrya*) here means *svātantrya śakti*, the free, absolute will of the Supreme, and vigour (*tejas*) is *citprakāśa*, the absolute light of consciousness. Then he explains *tejas* to mean the unity (*sāmarasya*) of the powers of will (*icchā*), knowledge (*jñāna*) and action (*kriyā*), which refreshes everything and invigorates every living being. Therefore, *tejas* in this sense is *amṛta* or nectar.

In the Vaiṣṇava Tantras, sovereignty in the form of the absolute will manifesting itself in total independence and freedom is expressed by the word *tejas*, one of six attributes which describe the lordship (*aiśvarya*) of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī, his *śakti*.

तेजः षष्ठं गुणं प्राहुस्तमिमं तत्त्ववेदिनः ।
पराभिभव सामर्थ्यं तेजः केचित्प्रचक्षते ॥

LT II.34

My capacity to accomplish all things without aid is called by the enlightened my sixth attribute *tejas*. Some define *tejas* as the power to subjugate. (Tr. Sanjukta Gupta)

सहकार्यनपेक्षा या तत्तेजः समुदाहृतम् ।

AhSam II.61ab

Independence from any help of other agents, is called *tejas*.

Śaiva Siddhānta stresses the pure and independent position of the supreme Śiva with regard to the impure world and it differentiates his supreme power of *cit* from his more specific powers. Here *tejas* appears to refer to the Lord's power of will which impels other lower souls to act in the creation etc. of the world.

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स्थितौ सकारकानेतान् समाक्रम्य स्वतेजसा ।
युनक्ति स्वार्थसिद्ध्यर्थं भूतैरनभिलक्षितः ॥

MṛgĀ vp IV.12

At the time of maintenance (of the universe), (the Lord) enters these beings endowed with the instruments of action with his own energy (*tejas*), and, having done so, sets them to work in order to fulfil his own purpose. (And yet) he remains unnoticed by them.

The commentator, Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha, says that *tejas* here refers to the *icchā śakti* of Śiva, his power of will. Other Tāntric schools also represent the power of will by *tejas*:

इच्छारूपं परं तेजः सर्वदा भावयेद् बुधः ।

YoH I.72ab

O wise one, one should always meditate on the supreme energy (*tejas*) as the will. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

According to Amṛtānanda, one should meditate on the supreme light as the will which is the union of Śiva and Śakti. This will is the primeval energy of the deity by virtue of which it assumes an immanent nature as the Universe. The sacred circle (*cakra*) of the deity is the manifestation of that supreme energy. (Note H.N. Chakravarty)

Light (*tejas* or *jyotis*) is often declared to be the very nature of Śiva in diverse Tāntric schools.

उक्तं श्रीनिशिचारे च भैरवीयेण तेजसा ॥
व्याप्तं विश्वं प्रपश्यन्ति विकल्पोज्झितचेतसः ।

TĀl XIV 43cd–44ab

It is stated in the Niśicāra (Tantra) that those whose minds are free of thought constructs (*vikalpa*) perceive the universe to be pervaded by the luminous energy (*tejas*) of the Lord. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

ज्योतिः प्रकाशरूपाणां दर्शनाकृतिलक्षणम् ।
अशेषोद्भासकरणाज्ज्योतीरूपः शिवोऽव्ययः ॥

RauĀ vp X.43

Light is characterised as cognition of the form of things that are visible. The immutable Śiva makes everything manifest and so he is of the form of light.

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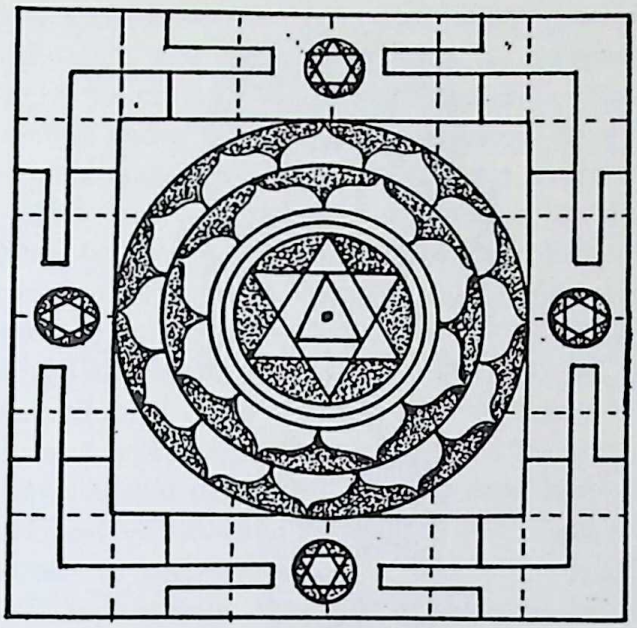

Figure 27: *Sūryapañcābjamaṇḍala*

One of the thousand names of Viṣṇu according to the **Mahābhārata** is Mahātejas (nom. m. *mahātejāḥ*). This name is said to express the same concept of God as the one giving illuminating power to all that shines. Another name is Jyotis, and Śaṅkara explains that this name implies that Viṣṇu is self-luminous light (ViSahasrBh 107).

> महातेजाः ॥
> यदीयेन तेजसा तेजस्विनो भास्करादयः तत्तेजो महदस्येति महातेजाः । "येन सूर्यस्तपति तेजसेद्धः" (तै.ब्रा० ३.१२.९) इति श्रुतेः । "यदादित्यगतं तेजः" (भ०गी० १५.१२) इति भगवद्वचनाच्च । क्रौर्यशौर्यादिभिर्धर्मैर्महद्भिः समलंकृत इति वा महातेजाः ॥
>
> ViSahasrBh 673
>
> Mahātejas means: He who has great light, i.e. the light by which the sun and other (celestial bodies) shine, in accordance with the Śruti (which declares): "By whom the sun shines, being illuminated by its effulgence"..., and the Gītā: "The light in the sun illumines the whole world, it is in the moon and fire, know that to be my light." Or the meaning is: adorned with great qualities, sharpness, valour etc.

The verse here quoted from the **Bhagavad-Gītā** has been explained by Śaṅkara as referring to all luminous bodies:

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Figure 28: Sūrya image: Alampur, A.P., 7th Cent. A.D.

यदादित्यगतं तेजो जगद्भासयतेऽखिलम् ।
यच्चन्द्रमसि यच्चाग्नौ तत्तेजो विद्धि मामकम् ॥

... तेजो दीप्तिः प्रकाशो जगद्भासयते प्रकाशयत्यखिलं समस्तं यच्चन्द्रमसि शशभृति तत्तेजोऽवभासकं वर्तते यच्चाग्नौ हुतवहे तत्तेजो विद्धि विजानीहि मामकं मदीयं मम विष्णोस्तज्ज्योतिः । अथवा यदादित्यगतं तेजश्चैतन्यात्मकं ज्योतिर्यच्चन्द्रमसि यच्चाग्नौ तत्तेजो विद्धि मामकं मदीयं मम विष्णोस्तज्ज्योतिः । ननु स्थावरेषु जङ्गमेषु च तत्समानं चैतन्यात्मकं ज्योतिस्तत्र कथमिदं विशेषणं यदादित्यगतमित्यादि । नैष दोषः, सत्त्वाधिक्यादाधिक्योपपत्तेः । आदित्यादिषु हि सत्त्वमत्यन्तप्रकाशमत्यन्तभास्वरमतस्तत्रैवाविस्तरं ज्योतिरिति तद्विशिष्यते, न तु तत्रैव तदधिकमिति ।

BhGŚBh XV.12

That light which residing in the sun illumines the whole world, that which is in the moon and in the fire, that light do thou know to be Mine.

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That *tejas* the splendour, the light which [abiding in the sun] *jagad bhāsayate*, illumines the world, *akhilam* in its entirety, *yaccandramasi* that light which is in the moon, *yaccāgnau* that light which is in fire, *viddhi* know this light as *māmakam*, belonging to me, Viṣṇu. Or *yadādityagataṃ tejaḥ*, i.e. the light made of consciousness, that which is in the moon, that which is in fire, know this light as *māmakam*, belonging to me, Viṣṇu. (Objection:) The light of consciousness exists in all alike, in the moving and unmoving objects: then why this qualification of light as 'residing in the sun,' etc. (Answer:) This objection does not apply here; for, the qualification may be explained on the ground that the better manifestation (of consciousness in the sun, etc.) is due to a higher proportion of Sattva. In the sun and other bodies (mentioned here) the Sattva is very brilliant and luminous; wherefore it is in them that the light of consciousness is better manifested. Hence the qualification; not that the light is a specific attribute of those bodies only. (Tr. A. Mahadeva Sastri)

The Concept of Light as Knowledge

In a comparison between the components of the world and those of the human person, Caraka equates light and knowledge:

> यथा खलु ब्राह्मी विभूतिर्लोके तथा पुरुषेऽप्यान्तरात्मिकी विभूतिः ... ज्योतिर्ज्ञानम् ... ॥
>
> CarSam ŚāSthā V.5
>
> As the magnificence of Brahman is in the world, such is the magnificence of the inner self in man, ..., as light is in the world, such is knowledge in man, ...

The use of such a concept is figurative. Light is a common simile for knowledge: the lamp symbolises the instrument of knowledge because both shed light on objects. Thus, for instance, Īśvarakṛṣṇa compares the sense organs with lamps:

> एते प्रदीपकल्पाः परस्परविलक्षणा गुणविशेषाः ।
> कृत्स्नं पुरुषस्यार्थं प्रकाश्य बुद्धौ प्रयच्छन्ति ॥
>
> प्रदीपकल्पा इत्यनेन प्रकाशसाम्यं करणपर्वण आचष्टे, यथा प्रदीपः प्रकाशक एवं करणमपि, तद्व्यापारे सति विषयाविर्भावानुपपत्तेः ।
>
> SāṃKā 36 with YuDīp

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These are specific transformations of the *guṇas* (i.e. the sense organs). They being different one from the other, are like lamps: they shed light on every object and present them to the *buddhi*, for the benefit of the *puruṣa*.

By saying that the sense organs are like lamps, the author asserts that they are similar to light. As the lamp illuminates, so does the organ of sense, because no object can appear in the absence of activity of the organs.

There is another usage, which is not figurative. Again, according to Sāṃkhya, knowledge is a transformation of →*prakṛti* produced when *sattva* is prominent. *Prakṛti* has three qualities (→*guṇa*) which are present in all transformations that occur in the psychic substance. The state of one *guṇa* in relation to the others determines the type of the occurring transformation. The three *guṇas* are: *sattva* defined as *prakāśaśīla* 'luminous'; *rajas* defined as *kriyāśīla* 'active'; *tamas*, defined as *sthitiśīla* 'inertia', (YSūBh and YSū II.18). Thus light is described as the fundamental substance of knowledge. The absence of knowledge and delusion (*moha*) occurs when *tamas* predominates. Thus light and darkness are conceived as fundamental constituents of the constitutive substance of the mind and the psychic transformations. Thus clear knowledge is defined as that transformation of the mind in which *sattva* is prominent. And the essence of *sattva* is light (YuDīp on SāṃKā 23, p. 96). In this particular sense of the word, *prakāśa* is definitely preferred, while sometimes, but rarely, the word *tejas* is used with reference to *rajas*, owing to its dynamic connotation (cf. MBh XIII.85.12, quoted *supra* under →*bhūta/mahābhūta*). Instances of the use of the term *prakāśa* are numerous.

प्रकाशं च प्रवृत्तिं च मोहमेव च पाण्डव ।
न द्वेष्टि संप्रवृत्तानि न निवृत्तानि काङ्क्षति ॥

BhG XIV.22

Radiance, activity, delusion too – when these arise he hates them not; and when (in turn) they cease he pines not after them. (Tr. R.C. Zaehner)

This passage refers to the three *guṇas* amongst which *prakāśa* represents the *sattva* contents of knowledge.

The image of light, in its function of illuminating objects and procuring knowledge, is naturally applicable to speech (→*vāc*). Bhartṛhari ascribes the highest ontological status to speech. One of his primary tenets is the identity of word and knowledge. Accordingly, he often uses the designation of light:

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वाग्रूपता चेदुत्क्रामेदवबोधस्य शाश्वती ।
न प्रकाशः प्रकाशेत सा हि प्रत्यवमर्शिनी ॥

Vāk I.116 (124)

If this eternal identity of knowledge and the word were to disappear the light (of knowledge) would cease to illuminate; it is this identity which makes the thorough consideration (of a complex object) possible.

A poetical echo of this idea appears in Daṇḍin's words:

इदमन्धं तमः कृत्स्नं जायेत भुवनत्रयम् ।
यदि शब्दाह्वयं ज्योतिरासंसारं न दीप्यते ॥

Kāvyād I.4

The entire triple world would become total darkness, if the light called 'Word' were not to illuminate it as long as it rolls on.

At the metaphysical level Bhartṛhari conceives speech to be a unitary principle which he represents as light and identifies with pure consciousness. Grammar or *vyākaraṇa*, which is the art of correct speech, is said to be the royal way of access to the pure light of speech.

प्राप्तरूपविभागाया यो वाचः परमो रसः ।
यत्तत्पुण्यतमं ज्योतिस्तस्य मार्गोऽयमाञ्जसः ॥

* * *

प्रत्यस्तमितभेदाया यद्वाचो रूपमुत्तमम् ।
यदस्मिन्नेव तमसि ज्योतिः शुद्धं विवर्तते ॥
वैकृतं समतिक्रान्ता मूर्तिव्यापारदर्शनम् ।
व्यतीत्यालोकतमसी प्रकाशं यमुपासते ॥

* * *

यदेकं प्रक्रियाभेदैर्बहुधा प्रविभज्यते ।
तद्व्याकरणमागम्य परं ब्रह्माधिगम्यते ॥

Vāk I.12, 18–19, 22

This discipline is the shortest route to the attainment of that supreme essence of the Word which has assumed differentiation, of the holiest of all lights...

That which is the highest form of undifferentiated speech, the pure Light which appears differentiated only in the midst of all this darkness, the Light which those worship who have passed beyond the manifested state consisting of the cognition of things and actions

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and beyond light and darkness, ... that which, though one, is divided in many parts by different modes of formations, that supreme Brahman is attained by a knowledge of grammar. (Tr. K.A.S. Iyer)

A closely related concept elaborated in Tāntric schools, such as the Śaiva Siddhānta for example, is that the sacred scriptures are a form of the speech of Śiva's consciousness. This is also represented by light and the **Ajitāgama** describes the 'descent of the scriptures' from Śiva to the world in words very close to those of Daṇḍin:

वेदादिग्रन्थजालं यत्तत्सर्वमवदत्प्रभुः ।
यदि शब्दमयं ज्योतिर्दीप्यते न जगत्स्वतः ॥
अज्ञानेनान्धतमसा भवेदस्तं गतं जगत् ।
इति संचिन्त्य देवेशः समुत्पाद्य दशात्मजान् ॥
तेषां ज्ञानं ददौ ... ।

AjitĀ I.33–35a

The Lord uttered the whole bulk of works, Vedas and others. He thought: "If the light made of speech were not to illuminate the world by itself, the world would set in blind darkness". Then the Lord created ten sons from his self and gave them knowledge...

The light of knowledge has two aspects. On one side there is knowledge as a psychic state having the form of a particular object, and on the other the consciousness which the self has with regard to that knowledge. The pure consciousness of the self and the supreme self is also designated with words signifying light, mostly *jyotis*, sometimes *tejas* (NītiŚat 1). Śaṅkara declares that the self is denoted by the word light (*jyotis*, Bh on BrSū IV. 4.3). Thus:

ज्योतिषामपि तज्ज्योतिस्तमसः परमुच्यते ।
ज्ञानं ज्ञेयं ज्ञानगम्यं हृदि सर्वस्य विष्ठितम् ॥

BhG XIII.17

Light of lights, 'Beyond the Darkness,' it is called: (true) knowledge, what should be known, accessible to knowledge, established in the heart of all. (Tr. R.C. Zaehner)

The concept of supreme light is particularly associated with the purest form of the Self. It is the light obscured by contact with the objects of the senses. It becomes fully manifest at the time of liberation. According to Patañjali, liberation is the independent state of isolation of the *puruṣa*. Only when he is alone (*kevala*) is he established in his own essence and this essence is declared to be light, as the **Vyāsa Bhāṣya** explains:

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तदा पुरुषः स्वरूपमात्रज्योतिरमलः केवली भवति ॥

YSūBh III.55

Then the Self having its light within itself becomes undefiled and isolated. (Tr. J.H. Woods)

The light is not only the self, but also the supreme Self, i.e. the Brahman. This idea has a strong base in the Upaniṣads. An early text like the **Bṛhaddevatā** had already declared it:

स ब्रह्मामृतमत्यन्तं योनिं सदसतोर्ध्रुवम् ।
महच्चाणु च विश्वेशं विशति ज्योतिरुत्तमम् ॥

BṛDev VIII.140

Such an one enters into the Brahma, the immortal, the infinite, the permanent source of that which is and is not, both vast and minute, the lord of all, the light supreme. (Tr. A.A. Macdonell)

Brahman is called light, *jyotis*, in various places in the Upaniṣads, for example in the **Chāndogya Upaniṣad** III.13.7 (see *supra* p. 262). The **Brahma-Sūtra** formulates this identification in the Sūtra: '*jyotiś caraṇābhidhānāt*' (BrSū I.1.24). When commenting on this aphorism, Śaṅkara reviews the possible meanings of the word 'light'. He examines a number of possible referents including the sun and other luminaries, the sky, the original *tejas* referred to in the **Chāndogya Upaniṣad** VI.3.3 as fire in union with water and food and the like. His conclusion is that *jyotis* refers to *Brahman*, because another passage of the Scripture (ṚV X.90.3 quoted in ChUp III.12.6) refers to *Brahman's* feet as consisting of the creatures as one foot, the three others being "the immortal one in the sky" (*tripādasyāmṛtaṃ divi*) and in the passage under discussion the light is mentioned in connection with the sky.

ज्योतिश्चरणाभिधानात् ॥

इदमामनन्ति – 'अथ यदतः परो दिवो ज्योतिर्दीप्यते विश्वतः पृष्ठेषु सर्वतः पृष्ठेष्वनुत्तमेषूत्तमेषु लोकेष्विदं वाव तद्यदिदमस्मिन्नन्तः पुरुषे ज्योतिः' इति । तत्र संशयः – किमिह ज्योतिःशब्देनादित्यादि ज्योतिरभिधीयते, किंवा परमात्मेति । ... नैष दोषः, 'यदतः परो दिवो ज्योतिः' इति प्रथमतरपठितेन यच्छब्देन सर्वनाम्ना द्युसंबन्धात्प्रत्यभिज्ञायमाने पूर्ववाक्यनिर्दिष्टे ब्रह्मणि स्वसामर्थ्येन परामृष्टे सत्यर्थाज्ज्योतिःशब्दस्यापि ब्रह्मविषयत्वोपपत्तेः । तस्मादिह ज्योतिरिति ब्रह्म प्रतिपत्तव्यम् ॥

BrSū I.1.24 with ŚBh

Light is (the Brahman), because there is designation of the quarters. Tradition says: "Now the light which shines higher than this heaven,

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on the backs of all, on the backs of everything, in the highest worlds, than which there are no higher– verily that is the same as this light which is here within a person". A doubt arises; does the word 'light' denote the light of the sun or another luminary, or the supreme self? ... That objection does not hold. In the sentence "the light which shines higher than this heaven" the pronoun *yat* read in the beginning refers to the *Brahman* mentioned in a previous passage,... Thus it is understood that the word *jyotis* also can refer to the *Brahman*. Therefore, the word *jyotis* must be understood in the sense of '*Brahman*'. (Based on the tr. by L. Renou)

The designation of →*Brahman* (Vol.I) as light is of very frequent occurence in all schools and branches of literature.

त्वं हि ब्रह्म परं ज्योतिर्गूढं ब्रह्मणि वाङ्मये ।
यं पश्यन्त्यमलात्मानमाकाशमिव केवलम् ॥

BhāgPur X.63.34

Thou art indeed the perfect being and supreme light lying hidden in *śabda brahman* (the Vedas) whom those of pure heart realise to be pure and absolute like *ākāśa* (space). (Tr. S. Subbarao)

Tāntric schools retain the concept that this light is that of the supreme soul and they identify it as the supreme form of the godhead and object of worship. According to the Śaiva Siddhānta, light is the essence of Śiva, who is *cit*, consciousness, defined as *jñāna* and *kriyā*, knowledge and action. In the supreme Śiva consciousness is unitary, undivided and conceived as power (*śakti*). *Śakti* is often qualified or designated as light. The word *tejas* is used even with reference to the highest principle because it retains a connotation of power and hence is an appropriate term to refer to the powers of knowledge and action. For instance the **Mṛgendra Āgama** opposes the terrestrial body to the self made of *cit* in a meditation:

तेनातिवाहिकारूढं दृक्क्रियाशक्तितेजसा ॥
वपुः पाशात्मकं व्याप्तं सूत्रस्थं भौवनं स्मरेत् ।

MṛgĀ kp VII.79cd–80ab

He (the teacher) should imagine the terrestrial body [of the disciple] made of the fetters and placed on the thread [in *dīkṣā* ritual] as pervaded by the luminous powers of knowledge and action established in the subtle body. (Based on the tr. by H. Brunner)

The concept of God or Brahman as light is the basis for practices of meditation on light:

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तत्तुरीयं परं ब्रह्म ज्योतिर्दीपो घटे यथा ।
तथा हृत्पद्मनिलयं ध्यायेत् ... ॥

AgPur 372.26

That supreme Brahman which is the fourth (state of consciousness beyond waking, dream and sleep), is of the nature of light. One should meditate on it as residing in the lotus of the heart, like a lamp in a jar. (Tr. R.S. Bhattacharya)

Manifestation in the Arts

Alaṃkāra-Śāstra, that is Sanskrit poetics, makes use of the analogy of light in several of its aspects when classifying the qualities of a hero. Light or radiance expresses human or godly physical beauty. In fact most of the Sanskrit words which refer to beauty belong to the semantic field of light. Thus words connoting different types of brightness serve to differentiate masculine and feminine beauty. For instance, the hero's brilliance is said to be *aujjvalya*, a word which describes a blazing fire, whereas the heroine's beauty is *lāvaṇya*, a term normally used to describe the shining of a pearl etc. In its chapter on dramatic action (*abhinaya*), Bharata gives a list of seven natural (*ayatnaja*) qualities which are the ornaments (*alaṃkāra*) that decorate the heroine. It includes three terms expressing brilliance, *śobhā, kānti* and *dīpti* which are defined thus:

रूपयौवनलावण्यैरुपभोगोपबृंहितैः ।
अलंकरणमङ्गानां शोभेति परिकीर्तिता ॥
विज्ञेया च तथा कान्तिः शोभैवापूर्णमन्मथा ।
कान्तिरेवातिविस्तीर्णा दीप्तिरित्यभिधीयते ॥

NŚ XXII.27–28

Adornment of the body with beauty, youth and pearl like lustre, intensified by enjoyment, is called *śobhā*. The same, when it is caused by love which has been fully satisfied, is known as *kānti*. And *kānti* elevated to the highest degree is called *dīpti*.

This list of terms along with their definitions are borrowed by Rūpagosvāmin who formulates them in a different way (cf. UjNīl XI (*anubhāva*) 12cd–16ab). He adds a definition of *lāvaṇya*:

मुक्ताफलेषु छायायास्तरलत्वमिवान्तरा ।
प्रतिभाति यदङ्गेषु लावण्यं तदिहोच्यते ॥

UjNīl X (uddīpanaprakaraṇa).26

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That wave-like expansion of lustre within pearls, which appears as beauty in the limbs (of the body) is called *lāvaṇya.*

Bharata gives a similar list of natural qualities the hero possesses, amongst which are *śobhā* and *tejas. Tejas* in this case means power with a connotation of self-restraint and forbearance (cf. NŚ XXII.41, see *supra* p. 2). Man's *śobhā* is not a physical lustre, but the moral lustre which accompanies dynamic and elevated qualities:

दाक्ष्यं शौर्यमथोत्साहो नीचार्थेषु जुगुप्सनम् ।
उत्तमैश्च गुणैः स्पर्धा यतः शोभेति सा स्मृता ॥

NŚ XXII.34

(That natural quality) from which derive skill, valour, enthusiasm, disgust for low things, rivalry for the highest qualities, is called *śobhā.*

Another important poetical convention is the idea of radiance (*tejas*). The heroe' s radiant power can literally be perceived in the form of light issuing from his body and illuminating objects around him. This convention is recorded in texts on poetics and abundantly illustrated in poetry. For instance when Vidyānātha explains under the technical name *tejasvitā* one of the qualities of the hero (*nāyaka*):

जगत्प्रकाशकत्वं यत्तेजस्वित्वं तदुच्यते । यथा –
सदा तेजोभानौ स्फुरति जयिनः काकतिविभोर्
अरिक्ष्माभृत्कान्ताचिकुरतिमिराहंकृतिमुषि ।
प्रकाशव्युत्पत्तिर्भवति जरदुद्दामतमसाम्
असूर्यंपश्यानामवधिगिरिपार्श्वात्यदृषदाम् ॥

Pratāparudrīya I (nāyakaprakaraṇa). 17

The ability to illuminate the world is called *tejasvitā.*
As the sun-like lustre of the victorious Kākatīya king is always bright, supressing the pride of the darkness in the form of the hair of the enemy's queens (the widows of slain enemies shave their head), the outer hillsides at the frontiers of the world, which never saw sunlight, where intense obscurity has grown old, learn what is light.

This convention is the source of many conceits in refined Sanskrit poetry. Light is emitted from the body and projected onto the surrounding objects, as are the shining colours of the body. Thus Bāṇabhaṭṭa describes the ruddy lustre of an ascetic called Bhairavācārya:

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उन्मिषता विद्युत्कपिलेनात्मतेजसा महामांसविक्रयक्रीतेन मनःशिलापङ्केनेव शिष्यलोकं लिम्पन्तम्, ...
ईषत्काचकाचरकनीनिकेन रक्तापाङ्गनिर्गतांशुप्रतानेन मध्यधवलभासेन्द्रायुधेनेवातिदीर्घेण लोचनयुगलेन परितो महामण्डलमिवानेकवर्णरागमालिखन्तं सितपीतलोहितपताकावलीशबलं शिवबलिमिव दिक्षु विक्षिपन्तम्, ... ।

HarṣCar Ch III pp. 46–47

Through his own flashing lustre, as tawny as lightning, [Bhairavācārya] seemed to be anointing the troop of his disciples with a paste of realgar purchased at the price of human flesh.

[When he cast glances from] his very elongated eyes, similar to Indra's bow with their pupils greenish like glass, with the rays which shot forth from their red corners and with the white in between, [Bhairavācārya] seemed to draw a large magic circle tinged with many colours all around and to scatter in all quarters a pure oblation variegated with white, green and red spots.

The works of Sanskrit poetics or Alaṃkāra-Śāstra give this type of imagery as an example of *utprekṣā-alaṃkāra* 'poetical supposition' in which something imaginary is superimposed onto the real features of an object or a person described by the poet. A similar type of superimposition is achieved by *tadguṇa-alaṃkāra* in which a quality of the described object is transferred to another one which loses its own property. The Ālaṃkārikas have often illustrated it with a verse describing a transfer of lustre from the body of the hero. For instance:

तद्गुणः स्वगुणत्यागादन्यदीयगुणग्रहः ।
पद्मरागायते नासामौक्तिकं तेऽधरत्विषा ॥
यथा वा –
वीर त्वद्रिपुरमणी परिधातुं पल्लवानि संस्पृश्य ।
न हरति वनभुवि निजकररुहरुचिरुचितानि पाण्डुपत्रधिया ॥

Candrāloka with Kuvalayānanda 141

The 'transfer of quality' (*tadguṇa*) (is a figure of speech in which the object the poet describes) abandons its own quality and assumes that of another. (For example the poet says:) The pearl on your nose shines like a ruby, because of the lustre of your lower lip.

Or: O hero, your enemy's queen touches new sprouts she wishes to wear in the forest, but does not pluck them, thinking they are dried leaves, because they are coloured by the lustre of her nails.

Alaṃkāra-Śāstra also describes a figure of speech called the 'illuminator'

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(*dīpaka*). In this case, the same property is ascribed to several objects, implying a comparison between them, and suggesting the excellence of the thing described. According to Kuntaka the beauty of the figure of speech lies in its highlighting the excellence of the poet's subject in a way which is novel and not trite. He writes:

औचित्यावहमस्त्रानं तद्विदाह्लादकारणम् ।
अशक्तं धर्ममर्थानां दीपयद्वस्तु दीपकम् ॥
एकं प्रकाशकं सन्ति भूयांसि भूयसां क्वचित् ।
केवलं पङ्क्तिसंस्थं वा द्विविधं परिदृश्यते ॥

VaJī III.17–18

An object (in poetic diction) which serves to highlight (lit. 'illuminate') a non-explicitly mentioned attribute of the objects described (by the poet) which enhances the propriety (of his poetic statements), is lucid and capable of delighting the connoisseur is termed an 'illuminator' or *dīpaka*.

(This) *dīpaka* is of two kinds: It may either be single or in a series. That is, a single object may illuminate many things, or many objects may be illuminating many other things.

The choice illustration for the *dīpaka* 'in a series' displays successive 'illuminators' which progressively enhance the excellence of the last item described:

चन्द्रमऊएहिं णिसा णलिनी कमलेहिं कुसुमगुच्छेहिं लआ ।
हंसेहिं सारअसोहा कव्वकहा सज्जनेहिं करइ गरुई ॥

(चन्द्रमयूखैर्निशा नलिनी कमलैः कुसुमगुच्छैर्लता ।
हंसैश्शारदशोभा काव्यकथा सज्जनैः क्रियते गुर्वी ॥)

VaJī III.83

To the night greatness is brought by moon-beams,
To the lotus-plant by flowers;
To the glory of autumn by swans;
And so too to poetic works
By the grace of good critics. (Tr. K. Krishnamoorthy)

Theatre, which is to a large extent a visual art, is a particularly apt medium for the representation of light. The best example is the shadow theatre. In India this is a popular art but it does not find much place in the Sanskrit tradition and is largely ignored by the theoreticians of Sanskrit theatre. One instance is the leather puppet show of South India. Puppets are cut out of sheets of goat's skin, painted with the features and colours of the deity or hero and perforated

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Figure 29: Śiva Naṭarāja with *agniprabhā*: Tanjore

with a series of small holes in the places where necklaces, bracelets and other ornaments are supposed to be. The thin leather is slightly translucent, so that the colour appears on the screen when the puppet is placed against it with the source of light behind it. The light passing through the numerous tiny holes gives the impression of as many glittering precious stones. There is no black shadow. Indeed, this is really more an art of light than shadow.

In the field of the plastic arts light cannot be represented directly. Only the element fire is shown directly through a flame, which is the attribute of the deity (→*agni*). Thus Śiva Naṭarāja dances in a circle of flames and holds flames in his hand. *Tejas*, as both fire and light, figures prominently in a major Śaiva myth concerning the origin of the *Liṅga*. Śiva reveals his superiority by manifesting his *Liṅga* in the form of a pillar made of his lustre. It is said to be "equal to a hundred doomsday fires, without beginning, middle or end, incomparable, indescribable and undefinable", whose bottom and top Viṣṇu and Brahman could not reach (Liṅga Purāṇa I.17; Tiruvācakam XVIII.8). Tamil

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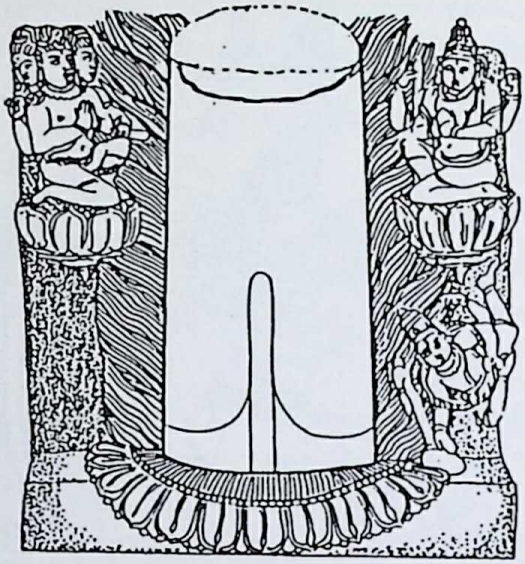

Figure 30: *Jyotirliṅga:* Gupta Period, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi

Śaivites believe that this mythical event took place in Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, where a vast temple dedicated to Śiva's form of fire has been built at the foot of a hill. The hill itself is called *Aruṇācala* the 'Ruddy Mountain' which is believed to be what remains of that pillar of light. On the day of the yearly festival of the temple in the month of *Kārttika*, a fire is lit at the fall of night, as a re-enactment of the myth.

The lustre of God is represented in sculpture by an aureole. It is technically called *prabhāvalī* or *prabhāmaṇḍala*, lit. 'circle of light'. A simple form of this halo is the discus around the head of the Sun-God, Sūrya. More elaborate forms can be found in the case of other deities. In South Indian bronzes it has become an arch encircling the entire body of the image.

The glitter of jewels and precious stones is also apt to suggest luminosity. Accordingly, ornaments are profusely displayed on all parts of the body of the deity to represent its splendour and lustre. The art of setting precious stones in sculptures and even paintings was developed, for instance, in the 18th century Tanjore school of painting. Theoretical instructions for the making of images often refer to the representation of light in this way:

ऋषयः पितरश्चैव देवताश्च नराधिप ।
स्वप्रभाभरणाः कार्या द्युतिमन्तस्तथैव च ।
मुष्णन्तस्तेजसां तेजः परेषां नृपसत्तम ॥

VDhPur III.37.16

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Figure 31: Buddha with *prabhāmaṇḍala*: Mathura, Gupta Period

> Sages, Manes and Gods, Oh Lord of men, should be made glowing and with ornaments consistent with their own colour and robbing the lustre of other lustrous beings. (Based on the tr. by S. Kramrisch)

A rather exceptional method of symbolic representation is attested in a theoretical work, the **Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad**:

> प्राजापत्यरीत्या वृत्तं हि तेजः, तदाऽपांभासे चतुरस्रम् ॥
>
> VSUp II.11
>
> Following the order of Prajāpati the circle represents light (*tejas*) while the square indicates water. (Tr. A. Boner – B. Bäumer)

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Process

The concept of light as *sattva*, the most excellent of the three components of Nature (→*prakṛti*), is further elevated by applying it to the nature of consciousness of the pure self and of God. This is clearly evident by the prominent role the lamp (*dīpa*) plays in ritual. It is a traditional act of piety to donate money to a temple for the maintenance of a lighted lamp in the sanctum of the deity. The flame of a lamp in the dark cella of a temple indicates the presence of God. Placed in the upper tiers of a *gopura* the sign of this presence is visible from far away. Waving a light in front of a deity is one of the major offerings (*upacāras*) made to the deity in the course of daily worship (*pūjā*). This act is called *nīrājana* and generally consists of waving a piece of burning camphor on a brass tray in front of the image of the deity. The rite is accomplished by the utterance of *mantras*. It is significant that an Upaniṣadic text describing the supreme *Brahman* as the source of light is then recited:

न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न चन्द्रतारकं नेमा विद्युतो भान्ति कुतोऽयमग्निः ।
तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वं तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति ॥

MuṇḍUp II.2.11

Neither sun nor moon nor stars shine there.
Neither lightning nor fire finds there a place.
With the radiance of that Light alone all things shine.
That radiance illumines all this world. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

The unitary concept of light as an element, physical lustre, luminous essence and knowledge underlies the idea of representing the fruits accruing from the practice of certain Upaniṣadic meditations as a special radiance acquired by the successful disciple and, of course, possessed by the teacher. This is evoked in a famous passage of the **Taittirīya Upaniṣad**. It teaches a meditation (*upāsanā*) on the conjunction of the component layers of the universe etc. This is an experience of knowledge which gives several beneficial results to the adept. The disciple who undertakes it with the help of a teacher prays at the beginning to obtain fruits. Among these fame and *brahmavarcas* are mentioned. *Varcas* means 'lustre' and *Brahman* refers here to the knowledge achieved through the Upaniṣad. This is because spiritual knowledge confers physical lustre to its possessor.

सह नौ यशः । सह नौ ब्रह्मवर्चसम् ।

अधुना संहितोपनिषदुच्यते । तत्र संहितायुपनिषत्परिज्ञाननिमित्तं यद्यशः प्राप्यते तन्नावावयोः शिष्याचार्ययोः सहैवास्तु । तन्निमित्तं च यद्ब्रह्मवर्चसं तेजः तच्च

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सहैवास्त्विति शिष्यवचनमाशीः ।...
तेज इति मुखकान्त्यादिरूपमुपनिषत्परिज्ञाननिमित्तकमित्यर्थः ।

TUp I.3 with ŚBh and Vanamālā of
Acyuta Kṛṣṇānanda Tīrtha

May fame accrue to us both. May *Brahman's* lustre accrue to us both.
Now the Upaniṣad concerning conjunction is uttered. Whatever fame accrues from the knowledge of the Upaniṣad, whatever *brahmavarcas*, i.e. lustre is caused by the same, may it accrue to both of us. This is the prayer of the disciple.

Tejas here means the lustre of the face etc., brought about by knowledge of the Upaniṣad.

An important connotation of the term *tejas* is the idea of energy and power. In the context of ritual this term is accordingly used to refer to the idea of a protective force produced by the utterance of a *mantra*.

ऊर्ध्वोर्ध्वमस्त्रमन्त्रेण दिग्बन्धमपि देशिकः ।
तेन संजनितं तेजो रक्षां कुर्यात्समन्ततः ॥

ŚāTil IV.24

The teacher also binds the directions by uttering the *astramantra* (*Phaṭ*) above his head. The energy that emanates from it thus protects the worshipper on all sides. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

The same concept of light as both the element fire as well as psychic matter has been used in Yoga. Thus, *dhāraṇā*, a yogic practice, is defined as the fixing of the mind on a place in the body. One such place is the 'lustre above the head'. Vijñāna Bhikṣu describes this as the subtle body (*liṅgaśarīra*) along with the vital breaths said to be situated at a point twelve inches above the skull and significantly compared to the flame of a lamp.

मूर्ध्न्युपरि द्वादशाङ्गुलपरिमिते देशे लिङ्गशरीरस्य सप्राणस्य तावत्पर्यन्तं प्रदीपशिखावदवस्थानादवहितैस्तावत्पर्यन्तमेव लिङ्गशरीरानुगतोष्मोपलभ्यते ।

YSūVā III.1

The subtle body with the vital breaths (blaze upwards) like the flame of a lamp, into a space measuring twelve inches above the skull. For this reason, those who are attentive perceive the heat of the subtle body up to that point.

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Concentration (*saṃyama*) on this lustre passes through three stages. First comes attention (*dhāraṇā*), followed by meditation (*dhyāna*) which is a continuous flow of mental representation. Finally, the mind rests as if identified with the object of meditation (*samādhi*). In this way, the yogi achieves a vision of the Siddhas. The Siddhas are accomplished Yogins who are endowed with all supernatural yogic powers and are normally invisible.

मूर्धज्योतिषि सिद्धदर्शनम् ॥

शिरःकपालेऽन्तश्छिद्रं प्रभास्वरं ज्योतिः ।तत्र संयमं कृत्वा सिद्धानां द्यावापृथिव्योरन्तरालचारिणां दर्शनम् ॥

YSūBh III.32

(As a result of concentration) *saṃyama* on the radiance on the head (there follows) the vision of the Siddhas.

In the skull there is an opening and a radiant light. By concentration (*saṃyama*) on this light (one attains) a vision of the Siddhas who move in the space between the earth and the sky.

Conclusion

The shades of meaning and application of the words *jyotis, tejas* and *prakāśa* cover a wide range of concepts. The word *tejas* seems to be the most comprehensive term. It includes the ideas of a material element, fire, of light, of all forms of shining, as well as of energy and power. Ultimately, it denotes the energy of God's consciousness. The words *jyotis* and *prakāśa* are closely associated and have numerous synonyms with further shades of meaning. Indeed, the range of words in Sanskrit used to denote light gives us a broad picture of the basic presuppositions of Indian thought. For example, a noteable feature of their range of application is the continuity they implicitly denote between matter and spirit. Thus, the same word serves to denote fire, light and consciousness, indicating in this way an underlying concept of the unity of diverse categories of reality.

Vedānta Deśika, who was both a profound philosopher and a great poet, recalls an Upaniṣadic passage which describes the Self as a tiny but powerful flame in the heart (TUp II.11 *Nārāyaṇānuvāka*), and thus contemplates God in the inner recess of his heart. In one stanza he covers the whole span of the concept of light: the flame in the heart, the image of the blue god Nārāyaṇa residing on the Hill of Elephants, Hastigiri in Kāñcipuram, the consciousness of ascetics, the divine essence understood by meditation on the Upaniṣads:

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नागाचलेश निखिलोपनिषन्मनिषामङ्घ्रिषिकामरकतं परिचिन्वतां त्वाम् ।
तन्वी हृदि स्फुरति कापि शिखा मुनीनां सौदामनीव निभृता नवमेघगर्भा ॥

Varadarājapañcāśat 20

O Lord of the Hill of Elephants, in the heart of the ascetics who think of you, an emerald in the jewel-case which is the intention of all Upaniṣads, shines a certain slender flame similar to a still lightning containing the new cloud.

Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat

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AP

Overview

Water (*ap* (f.), *udaka, jala*, and all other synonyms) is one of the most important elements in Indian cosmology, cosmogony, myth, ritual, symbolism, in medicine and architecture. The sacredness of the waters has hardly been emphasized so much in any other culture, and it includes the sacredness of rivers, lakes, oceans, springs and wells. The importance of water for rites of purification is well-known, and has influenced life-styles, architecture and iconography.

Fire and Water, *agni-soma*, or *tejas* and *ap* are the most representative pair of complementary principles in the universe and in the human psyche. It is the integration of these apparently contradictory elements which leads to the unification (*yoga*) and fulfilment of all dualities. Both, Vedic and Tāntric traditions have devoted much thought to this pair and its symbolism.

The Śāstras contain long lists of properties of water, and of its different qualities depending on the nature and source. Besides being an agent of purification, water is praised as the element giving life and fullness. Therefore the most universal symbolic form is the *pūrṇakumbha* or vase of fullness, containing the waters of life and immortality (*amṛta*).

Etymology and Related Words

One of the oldest, Vedic words for water is *ap*, pl. *āpaḥ*, f. Though many other words for water are not grammatically feminine (mostly n.), the nature of water (often in the plural) is nevertheless conceived to be feminine. We are not concerned here with one or several particular words designating 'water', the element (*bhūta* or *tattva*) and its various manifestations, but with any so-called synonym.

According to the **Nirukta** (IX.26) the etymology of *ap*, *āpaḥ* is related to the root *āp-* 'to pervade' or 'to obtain' (*āpnoti*) with the suffix *kvip* (*āpnoterhrasvaśca*, Uṇādi II.58). This traditional etymology refers to the qualities of water as pervasive and fertile.

The **Nighaṇṭu** (I.12) enumerates 101 words for water, out of which we may select the most common ones: *arṇa* (wave, flood; hence *arṇava*, ocean), *ambhas*

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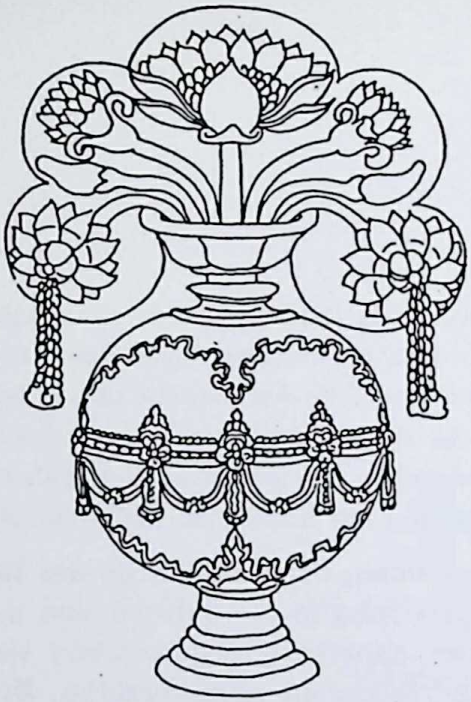

Figure 32: *Pūrṇaghaṭa*: Java

(celestial waters) and *salila* (the primordial, cosmic waters or flood), *ambu*, *rasa* (liquid, sap or juice, essence, water), *saras* (fluid, pool, pond, water, from which *sarasvatī* is derived, name of a river goddess), *udaka* (with the older, Vedic form *udan*: from the root *und-*, to flow, spring, to wet, bathe; one of the most commonly used words), *toya* (a common word), *vār* or *vāri* (water, fluid, rain), *jala* (water, fluid; very frequently used), *nīra* (water, juice). Other 'synonyms' denote the qualities or associations of water, e.g., *amṛta* (nectar), *yoni* (womb, because of the cosmogonic implications of water), *retas* (semen), *pūrṇa* (fullness), *nabhas* (mist, clouds, vapour; the sky or ether as humid element), etc. Even then this list does not exhaust the possible names for water and its manifestations, such as the ocean (*samudra, sāgara*), rivers (*sindhu, nadī*), lakes, ponds, channels, rain, waterfalls, and so on.

In the Kośa literature we find other lists of words or synonyms, some of which are descriptive (e.g., *meghaja*, 'cloud-born', *pānīya*, 'drinkable', *jīvana*, 'life', *svacchabhūta*, 'pure element', etc., VaiKo IV.2.1–4).

Innumerable compounds are formed with the various words denoting water, which need not be enumerated here, as they will occur in the texts.

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Layers of Meaning

Since water is one of the most fundamental elements in the Indian tradition (as in many other cultures), its meanings are multi-layered. At the physical level (*ādhibhautika*) there are the various cosmic manifestations, from clouds and rain to the rivers and sea. Water is also recognized as one of the main constituents of the human body. At the symbolic and ritual level (*adhiyājñika*), water has rich implications and uses, which have given rise to manifold expressions in art-forms. Its functions are purification (*pavana*) and offering, life-giving as well as dissolving (*visarjana*). At the spiritual level (*ādhyātmika*), water symbolizes inner purification, life and fullness (→*pūrṇa*, Vol. II).

Water thus plays an essential role in the three phases of manifestation: 1) in cosmogony (*sṛṣṭi*) and in the creation of life (aspects of fertility); 2) in continuance and renewal of cosmic and human life (*sthiti*, aspects of life-sustenance and purification); and 3) in dissolution, at the individual and cosmic levels (*pralaya*, the great flood, the destructive aspect). Two Upaniṣadic metaphors refer to water as the final resting-place and goal of beings: rivers flow into the sea, where they lose their 'name and form', and a lump of salt loses its individual identity when dissolved in water. In another Upaniṣadic and Buddhist metaphor, water is conceived as the dangerous stream or ocean of existence (*saṃsāra*, 'streaming together', also called *bhavasāgara*, 'ocean of existence') which must be crossed in order to reach liberation (*mokṣa, nirvāṇa*).

Various deities are associated with different aspects of water: Varuṇa, the Lord of the Waters who in post-Vedic times became merely a god of the ocean; Parjanya the Vedic rain-god; Agni, who in the **Ṛgveda** is called *Apāṃ Napāt*, 'Son of the Waters'; Sarasvatī, a river-goddess and later goddess of learning and arts who is always represented with the swan; Gaṅgā and other river goddesses, whose life-giving, fertilizing and purifying qualities can never be praised exhaustively; Viṣṇu who is conceived as resting on the world-ocean, and his consort Śrī/Lakṣmī who rises from the waters of a lotus pond; Śiva who bears the Gaṅgā in his matted hair where he has received her when she was falling from heaven, thus saving the earth from being flooded. Other mythological beings are associated with water, such as Yakṣas, Nāgas, Makaras.

The nature of the waters is ambivalent: they are both life-giving and destroying, purifying and dissolving. Another aspect of their ambivalence is that they are pure and transparent on the one hand, and dark and chaotic on the other. This ambiguity must be kept in mind when dealing with Indian conceptions of water.

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Development of the Concept

Vedic cosmogony remains basic to the Indian tradition, even if changes took place at a later stage. And *āpaḥ*, the divine Waters, also called goddesses (*devīḥ*), are the cosmogonic element *par excellence*. It is therefore proper to start with the cosmogonic role of the waters, before taking up the more descriptive aspects.

It is impossible to start any discussion of the role of the waters in cosmogony with anything other than the Nāsadīya-Sūkta of the **Ṛgveda**. Here, the greatest mysteries concerning the origin of the universe are expressed in the form of questions by the Vedic *ṛṣis*:

नासदासीन्नो सदासीत् तदानीं नासीद्रजो नो व्योमा परो यत् ।
किमावरीवः कुह कस्य शर्मन्नम्भः किमासीद्गहनं गभीरम् ॥
तम आसीत् तमसा गूळ्हमग्रेऽप्रकेतं सलिलं सर्वमा इदम् ।
तुच्छ्येनाभ्वपिहितं यदासीत् तपसस्तन्महिनाजायतैकम् ॥
ṚV X.129.1,3

At first, was neither Being nor Nonbeing.
There was not air nor yet sky beyond.
What was its wrapping? Where? In whose protection?
Was Water there, unfathomable and deep?
Darkness was there, all wrapped around by darkness,
and all was water indiscriminate. Then
that which was hidden by the Void, that One, emerging,
stirring, through power of Ardor, came to be. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

We find here two aspects of water: *ambhas* (v. 1) and *salila* (v. 3). The first is characterized as *gahanaṃ gabhīram* ("profound, unfathomable", J. Miller), and the second as *apraketa*, undifferentiated, amorphous chaos, *salila* being the primordial flood or limitless ocean. The hymn does not directly say that water was the primal element of creation, but it is the un-formed, deep, unfathomable element which comes closest to the original *asat* (the unmanifest). Its other association in this hymn is with fertility, because by the power of inner heat (*tapas*) the primordial creative Desire (*kāma*, v. 4) arose, "the primal germ cell of the mind". Here water is the symbol of fertility on a cosmic scale (cf. K.F. Geldner's comments, *Rig-Veda*, Vol. III, p. 359).

It is in the womb of the chaotic, yet fertile waters that the 'golden germ' of the universe, Hiraṇyagarbha, was born:

हिरण्यगर्भः समवर्ततात्रे भूतस्य जातः पतिरेक आसीत् ।
स दाधार पृथिवीं द्यामुतेमां कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥
ṚV X.121.1

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In the beginning rose Hiraṇyagarbha, born
Only Lord of all created beings.
He fixed and holdeth up this earth and heaven.
What God shall we adore with our oblation? (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

आपो ह यद्बृहतीर्विश्वमायन् गर्भं दधाना जनयन्तीरग्निम् ।
ततो देवानां समवर्ततासुरेकः कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥
यश्चिदापो महिना पर्यपश्यद् दक्षं दधाना जनयन्तीर्यज्ञम् ।
यो देवेष्वधि देव एक आसीत् कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥

ṚV X.121.7–8

When came the mighty Waters, bringing with them
the universal Germ, whence sprang the Fire,
thence leapt the God's One Spirit into being.
What God shall we adore with our oblation?

This One who in his might surveyed the Waters,
pregnant with vital forces, producing sacrifice,
he is the God of gods and none beside him,
What God shall we adore with our oblation? (Tr. R. Panikkar)

The waters are the primordial element giving birth to all the potentialities of creation (*garbha* means also 'womb' in the sense of 'potentiality'). But there is a 'God of gods', 'the One', who is ultimately the creator and 'surveyor' of the waters, who is also the "Father of the great and shining Waters" (v. 9).

The primeval germ or embryo of the Waters is also the condensation of all the gods in one, their common origin and unification:

परो दिवा पर एना पृथिव्या परो देवेभिरसुरैर्यदस्ति ।
कं स्विद्गर्भं प्रथमं दध्र आपो यत्र देवाः समपश्यन्त विश्वे ॥
तमिद्गर्भं प्रथमं दध्र आपो यत्र देवाः समगच्छन्त विश्वे ।
अजस्य नाभावध्येकमर्पितं यस्मिन् विश्वानि भुवनानि तस्थुः ॥

ṚV X.82.5–6

That which the Waters first received, beyond the heavens,
beyond the earth, beyond both Gods and demons–
say, what was that, the first primeval germ,
when all the assembled Gods, and they alone, were watching?

He was the primal germ borne by the Waters,
wherein all the Gods were coalesced together;
at the navel of the Nonborn the One and Only is set,
he upon whom depend all created beings. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

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Elsewhere the gods who are closely united in the primordial waters (*salila*) are compared to dancers – one of the earliest references, even though it is only a comparison.

यद्देवा अदः सलिले सुसंरब्धा अतिष्ठत ।
अत्रा वो नृत्यतामिव तीव्रो रेणुरपायत ॥

RV X.72.6

When at that time you were found in the waters,
O Gods, pressed together, close-clasping one another,
a storm of dust arose from your feet
as from the stamping feet of dancers. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

In the **Atharva-Veda**, the unity of the gods in connection with the cosmogonic waters is also compared to the relation of branches to a tree in the context of the *skambha* or *axis mundi*:

महद्यक्षं भुवनस्य मध्ये तपसि क्रान्तं सलिलस्य पृष्ठे ।
तस्मिन्छ्रयन्ते य उ के च देवा वृक्षस्य स्कन्धः परित इव शाखाः ॥

AV X.7.38

A great monster (*yakṣa*) in the midst of the creation (*bhuvana*), strode (*krānta*) in penance on the back of the Sea – in it are set (*śri*) whatever gods there are, like the branches of a tree roundabout the trunk. (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

In the above sense, the Waters are the chaotic and fertile source of creation, but in another sense they are created or at least released. Here time originates from the ocean, before the creation of sun, moon, heaven and earth (RV X.190.3).

ऋतं च सत्यं चाभीद्धात् तपसोऽध्यजायत ।
ततो रात्र्यजायत ततः समुद्रो अर्णवः ॥
समुद्रादर्णवादधि संवत्सरो अजायत ।
अहोरात्राणि विदधद्विश्वस्य मिषतो वशी ॥

RV X.190.1–2

From blazing Ardor Cosmic Order came
and Truth; from thence was born the obscure night;
from thence the Ocean with its billowing waves.

From Ocean with its waves was born the year
which marshals the succession of nights and days
controlling everything that blinks the eye. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

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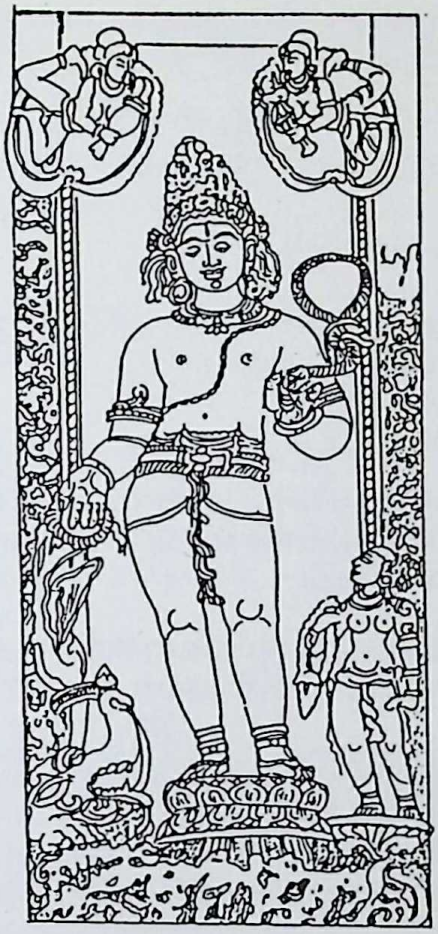

Figure 33: Varuṇa as *dikpāla*: Rājarāṇī Temple, Bhubaneswar, ca 1025 A.D.

Two of the Vedic gods have a special relation with water, namely Varuṇa and Indra. F.B.J. Kuiper summarizes the meaning of Varuṇa's designation as 'Lord of the Waters' in the following way:

> In the Veda the term "the waters" denoted, first and foremost, the primeval waters upon which the earth rested, and it can be proved that it was of these waters that Varuṇa became the ruler. Even after his incorporation in the ordered cosmos, accordingly, Varuṇa had a function which corresponded to his origin as god of the primordial world. (*Ancient Indian Cosmogony*, p. 16)

H. Lüders has devoted an entire monograph to "Varuṇa and the Waters" (see Bibliography), and it is impossible to go into great detail concerning his findings. The moral aspects of water in connection with Varuṇa will be discussed

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later. Here, however, Varuṇa's connection with the cosmic waters or oceans, above and below the earth, are evident.

उतेयं भूमिर्वरुणस्य राज्ञ उतासौ द्यौर्बृहती दूरेअन्ता ।
उतो समुद्रौ वरुणस्य कुक्षी उतास्मिन्नल्प उदके निलीनः ॥
AV IV.16.3

This earth is his; to him belongs
the lofty boundless sky above.
Varuṇa contains
within his body both the oceans,
and yet he is also contained
within one droplet. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

The most powerful myth of Indra is his conquest of Vṛtra, the obstructing mountain or rock which withholds the fertile waters. With his thunderbolt (*vajra*), Indra releases the waters:

भिनद् गिरिं शवसा वज्रमिष्णन्नाविष्कृण्वानः सहसान ओजः ।
वधीद् वृत्रं वज्रेण मन्दसानः सरन्नापो जवसा हतवृष्णीः ॥
ṚV IV.17.3

Hurling his bolt with might he cleft the mountain, while putting forth his strength, he showed his vigour.
He slaughtered Vṛtra with his bolt, exulting, and, their lord slain, forth flowed the waters swiftly. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

According to Lüders and others, this is a creation myth proper, but Kuiper distinguishes two stages: "... the Vedic cosmogonical myth comprises two different stages: first, that of an undivided primordial world which consists of 'the waters', and the beginning of the earth floating on the surface of them; second, that inaugurated by Indra's throwing his weapon, the *vajra*, against the dragon or the mountain itself, which thereby became firmly founded" (*Ancient Indian Cosmogony*, p. 116). He also shows how the Vedic ritual, especially in annual life-renewing ceremonies, was a re-enactment of the primordial creation act (*ibid.*). While releasing the waters from the obstructing dragon or hill, Indra at the same time releases the light.

Water and light – the sun–, and water and fire (Agni) are in many ways interrelated in Vedic cosmology. About the Sun it is said in the **Atharva-Veda**:

अपां यो अग्रे प्रतिमा बभूव प्रभूः सर्वस्मै पृथिवीव देवी ।
पिता वत्सानां पतिरघ्यानां साहस्रे पोषे अपि नः कृणोतु ॥
AV IX.4.2

He who in the beginning became the counterpart (*pratimā*) of the

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waters, prevailing (*prabhū*) for everything, like the divine earth, father of young (*vatsā*), lord of the inviolable (kine) – let him set (*kṛ*) us in thousandfold prosperity. (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

The Sun is born from the Waters, or stands in them like a golden reed. And the same relationship exists between Agni and Soma, both symbolically and ritually.

अप्स्वासीन्मातरिश्वा प्रविष्टः प्रविष्टा देवाः सलिलान्यासन् ।
बृहन् ह तस्थौ रजसो विमानः पवमानो हरित आ विवेश ॥

AV X.8.40

Mātariśvan then had entered the Waters;
the Gods also had passed beneath the ocean.
On high was the Sun, the measurer of space.
Soma, purified, had entered the golden flames. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

The sun rising from the Waters is a pervasive cosmic symbol, finding many expressions:

उद् वाज आ गन् यो अप्स्वन्तर्विश आ रोह त्वद्योनयो याः ।
सोमं दधानोऽप ओषधीर्गाश्चतुष्पदो द्विपद आ वेशयेह ॥

AV XIII.1.2

Up hath arisen the power (*vāja*) that is within the waters;
mount (*ā-ruh*) thou the clans (*viś*) that are sprung from thee (*tvad-yoni*); assuming (*dhā*) the Soma, the waters, the herbs, the kine, make thou the four-footed, the two-footed ones to enter here. (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

Vāc, the creative Word, is another power related to the Waters:

गौरीर्मिमाय सलिलानि तक्षत्येकपदी द्विपदी सा चतुष्पदी ।
अष्टापदी नवपदी बभूवुषी सहस्राक्षरा परमे व्योमन् ॥
तस्याः समुद्रा अधि वि क्षरन्ति तेन जीवन्ति प्रदिशश्चतस्रः ।
ततः क्षरत्यक्षरं तद् विश्वमुप जीवति ॥

ṚV I.164.41–42

The Cow-Buffalo bellowed, creating lakes, one foot, two feet, four feet, eight feet, nine feet in size, a thousand syllables in the supreme space.

From her flow down the oceans, by her exist the four regions of the world: from her (place) flows the imperishable (word), who nourishes the whole universe. (Tr. A. Padoux)

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There is a certain pun involved with the root *kṣar-*, to flow, and *akṣara*, the imperishable, the syllable OM (v. 39). The cow (here *gaurī*) is a Vedic symbol for *Vāc*, the Word, as one of the earliest aspects of the Goddess. Earlier naturalistic interpreters have understood *gaurī* as the rain-cloud with its thundering voice (H.H. Wilson).

The Waters are also related to *kāla*, Time, as in the **Atharva-Veda**:

कालादापः समभवन् कालाद्ब्रह्म तपो दिशः ।
कालेनोदेति सूर्यः काले नि विशते पुनः ॥

AV XIX.54.1

From time came into being the waters; from time (came) the brahman, fervor, the quarters; by time the sun rises; in time he goes to rest (*ni-viś*) again. (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

The close connection of Time, sound and Waters is mysteriously expressed in a hymn to the remnant of the primordial sacrifice (*ucchiṣṭa*, AV XI.7):

अर्धमासाश्च मासाश्चार्तवा ऋतुभिः सह ।
उच्छिष्टे घोषिणीरापः स्तनयित्नुः श्रुतिर्महो ॥

AV XI.7.20

Both the half-months and the months, the year-divisions (*ārtava*) with the seasons; in the remnant (are) the noisy waters, the thunder the great sound (*śruti*). (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

We can only give a cursory account of the place of the Waters in Vedic cosmology, a complex and much-discussed subject. The idea that the earth is established in the primordial Waters is also expressed in the Bhūmi-Sūkta of the **Atharva-Veda**:

यार्णवेऽधि सलिलमग्र आसीद् यां मायाभिरन्वचरन् मनीषिणः ।
यस्या हृदयं परमे व्योमन्त्सत्येनावृतममृतं पृथिव्याः ।
सा नो भूमिस्त्विषिं बलं राष्ट्रे दधातूत्तमे ॥

AV XII.1.8

She who in the beginning was sea (*salila*) upon the ocean (*arṇava*); whom she skilful (*manīṣin*) moved after with their devices (*māyā*); the earth whose immortal heart covered with truth is in the highest firmament (*vyoman*) – let that earth (*bhūmi*) assign to us brilliancy, strength, in highest royalty. (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

Kuiper summarizes the origin of the earth from the Waters:

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> "In the beginning there was only water, but these so-called primeval waters bore in themselves the germ of life. From the bottom a small clod of earth rose to the surface and became a mountain, the beginning of the earth, but it continued to float on the waters. There is a variant version in which the highest god, the World Father, drifted about, but the presence or absence of this god is only of marginal importance. The primordial world itself was sacred, and for the process of this genesis to take place there was no need of a creator. Things were considered to exist, somehow, in their own right. In this first stage, however, as represented by the mountain, the world was still an undifferentiated unity. The poets sometimes speak of a darkness as the initial state, but this is clearly a mere attempt to express what could not properly be expressed in words. None of the contrasts which constitute our phenomenal world yet existed. There was no heaven or earth, no day or night, no light or, properly speaking, darkness." (*Ancient Indian Cosmogony*, p. 10)

The waters are the support of the earth, and in the cosmic subterranean waters there was a receptacle for nectar (*amṛta/soma*). This is reflected in the epic-purāṇic myth of *amṛtamanthana*, the churning of the world-ocean. But there is also an ocean above the earth, a 'celestial bucket' or 'celestial well', which streams down fertile waters. "The same generative and life-promoting water, however, was also believed to fall down from heaven as rain. This raises the fundamental question as to how this water was thought to ascend to heaven, a difficulty that to my knowledge has never been stated. This is particularly manifest in stanzas like II.24.4 "The well that has a rock for orifice and streams of '*madhu*', (the well) which Brahmaṇaspati split open with force, that all 'sun-seers' have drunk; together they have poured down abundantly the spring of water". There can be no doubt that this *aśmāsya avata* is identical with the Vala (e.g., Lüders, p. 387 n. 5).

The answer to this question is twofold: 1) In the nocturnal aspect of the cosmos the cosmic waters form the night-time sky and are, accordingly, automatically above the earth. 2) In the day-time aspect the water is drawn from the spring in the earth up to the sky and then poured down." (*Ancient Indian Cosmogony* by F.B.J. Kuiper, p. 144)

In the case of the myth of Indra splitting open the primordial hill, the waters flow forth in four directions in the form of rivers. A similar cosmology is found in Buddhist and Jaina sources, where four rivers flow down from the central Mount Meru in the four directions.

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अदर्दरुत्समसृजो वि खानि त्वमर्णवान् बद्बधानाँ अरम्णाः ।
महान्तमिन्द्र पर्वतं वि यद् वः सृजो वि धारा अव दानवं हन् ॥

ṚV V.32.1

Thou splitst the well open, thou sentst
forth the (water from the) orifices, thou
setst to rest the flood that was hemmed in.
When thou, O Indra, uncoveredst the
big mountain, thou sentst forth the
streams and slewest the son of the Dānu. (Tr. F.B.J. Kuiper)

From the cosmic waters we may come to the earthly waters, which are life-giving, healing, purifying and refreshing:

समुद्रज्येष्ठाः सलिलस्य मध्यात् पुनाना यन्त्यनिविशमानाः ।
इन्द्रो या वज्री वृषभो रराद ता आपो देवीरिह मामवन्तु ॥
या आपो दिव्या उत वा स्रवन्ति खनित्रिमा उत वा याः स्वयंजाः ।
समुद्रार्था याः शुचयः पावकास्ता आपो देवीरिह मामवन्तु ॥

ṚV VII.49.1–2

Ceaselessly they flow from the depths, pure, never sleeping, the Ocean their sponsor,
following the channels ordained by the Thunderer.
Now may these great divine Waters quicken me!

Waters may pour from heaven or run along channels dug out by men;
or flow clear and pure having the ocean as their goal.
Now may these great divine Waters quicken me! (Tr. R. Panikkar)

The *āpaḥ* are called goddesses, and hence they are like mothers feeding their children:

आपो हि ष्ठा मयोभुवस्ता न ऊर्जे दधातन । महे रणाय चक्षसे॥
यो वः शिवतमो रसस्तस्य भाजयतेह नः । उशतीरिव मातरः॥
तस्मा अरं गमाम वो यस्य क्षयाय जिन्वथ । आपो जनयथा च नः ॥
शं नो देवीरभिष्टय आपो भवन्तु पीतये । शं योरभि स्रवन्तु नः॥
ईशाना वार्याणां क्षयन्तीश्चर्षणीनाम् । अपो याचामि भेषजम् ॥
अप्सु मे सोमो अब्रवीदन्तर्विश्वानि भेषजा । अग्निं च विश्वशंभुवम् ॥
आपः पृणीत भेषजं वरूथं तन्वे मम । ज्योक् च सूर्यं दृशे॥
इदमापः प्र वहत यत् किं च दुरितं मयि ।
यद्वाहमभिदुद्रोह यद्वा शेप उतानृतम्॥

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Figure 34: River goddesses and Nāga: Amaravati

आपो अद्यान्वचारिषं रसेन समगस्महि ।
पयस्वानग्न आ गहि तं मा सं सृज वर्चसा ॥

ṚV X.9

1. O Waters, source of happiness,
   pray give us vigor so that we
   may contemplate the great delight.
2. You like loving mothers are
   who long to give to children dear.
   Give us of your propitious sap.
3. On your behalf we desire, O Waters,
   to assist the one to whose house you send us –
   you, of our life and being the source.
4. These Waters be to us for drink;
   divine are they for aid and joy.
   May they impart to us health and strength!
5. You Waters who rule over precious things
   and have supreme control of men,
   we beg you, give us healing balm.
6. Within the Waters, Soma has told me,
   remedies exist of every sort
   and Agni who brings blessing to all.
7. O Waters, stored with healing balm
   through which my body safe will be,
   come, that I long may see the sun.

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8. Whatever sin is found in me,
whatever wrong I may have done,
if I have lied or falsely sworn,
Waters, remove it far from me.
9. Now I have come to seek the Waters.
Now we merge, mingling with the sap.
Come to me, Agni, rich in milk!
Come and endow me with your splendor! (Tr. R. Panikkar)

The waters are called sweet (*madhumat*), they are nectar (*amṛta, soma*) and are compared to the nourishing ghee or to milk.

आपो यं वः प्रथमं देवयन्त इन्द्रपानमूर्मिमकृण्वतेळः ।
तं वो वयं शुचिमरिप्रमद्य घृतप्रुषं मधुमन्तं वनेम ॥
तमूर्मिमापो मधुमत्तमं वोऽपां नपादवत्वाशुहेमा ।
यस्मिन्निन्द्रो वसुभिर्मादयाते तमश्याम देवयन्तो वो अद्य ॥

ṚV VII.47.1–2

May we obtain this day from you.
O waters that wave of pure refreshment, which the pious
Made earst the special beverage of Indra, bright, stainless, rich in sweets and dropping fatness.

May the Floods' offspring, he whose course is rapid, protect that wave most rich in sweets, O Waters,
That shall make Indra and the Vasus joyful. This may we gain from you to-day, we pious. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

The great cycle carries the waters from the ocean to the sky and makes them pour down as rain on the earth:

अपः समुद्राद्दिवमुद्वहन्ति दिवस्पृथिवीमभि ये सृजन्ति ।
ये अद्भिरीशाना मरुतश्चरन्ति ते नो मुञ्चन्त्वंहसः ॥

AV IV.27.4

Waters from the ocean to the sky they carry up, they who pour (them) from the sky upon the earth – the Maruts who go about lording it with the waters: let them free us from distress. (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

The Vedic conception is that rain is caused by a bucket pulled up to heaven and made to spill over:

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महान्तं कोशमुदचा नि षिञ्च स्यन्दन्तां कुल्या विषिताः पुरस्तात् ।
घृतेन द्यावापृथिवी व्युन्धि सुप्रपाणं भवत्वघ्न्याभ्यः ॥

ṚV V.83.8

Draw the great vessel up, let it spill over,
let the floodwaters burst forth and flow far.
Saturate both heaven and earth with fatness;
give to the cattle fair thirst-quenching pools. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

The ever-flowing nature of the waters is praised as life-giving:

यस्यामापः परिचराः समानीरहोरात्रे अप्रमादं क्षरन्ति ।
सा नो भूमिर्भूरिधारा पयो दुहामथो उक्षतु वर्चसा ॥

AV XII.1.9

On whom the circulating waters flow the same, night and day, without failure – let that earth (*bhūmi*), of many streams (*dhāra*) yield (*duh*) us milk; then let her sprinkle (us) with splendor. (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

सस्रुषीस्तदपसो दिवा नक्तं च सस्रुषीः ।
वरेण्यक्रतुरहमपो देवीरुप ह्वये ॥

AV VI.23.1

Flowing on, devoted to it; by day and by night flowing on;
I, of desirable activity, call upon the heavenly waters. (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

Being the life-essence, the waters can even bring man from non-existence to existence:

आपो वा ओषधयोऽसत्पुरुष आप एवास्मा असतः सद्ददति तस्मादाहुर्यश्चैवं वेद यश्च नाऽऽपस्त्वावासतः सद्ददति ... ।

TSam II.1.5.4

The plants are the waters, man is what is not, verily the waters give him being from non-existence. Therefore they say, both he who knows thus and who (knows) not, the waters verily give being from non-existence... (Tr. A.B. Keith)

This has to do with the healing power of the waters:

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अप्स्वन्तरमृतमप्सु भेषजमपामुत प्रशस्तये । देवा भवत वाजिनः ॥

ṚV I.23.19

Nectar is in the waters; in the waters there is healing balm:
Be swift, ye Gods, to give them praise. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

(cf. also YV IX.6)

आपः पृणीत भेषजं वरूथं तन्वे मम । ज्योक् च सूर्यं दृशे ॥

ṚV I.23.21

O waters, teem with medicine to keep my baby safe from harm so that I long may see the Sun. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

आप इद्वा उ भेषजीरापो अमीवचातनीः ।
आपः सर्वस्य भेषजीस्तास्ते कृण्वन्तु भेषजम् ॥

ṚV X.137.6

The waters have their healing power, the waters drive disease away.
The waters have a balm for all: let them make medicine for thee.
(Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

Not only for the living, but for the dead too, the waters bring refreshment, healing and strength:

सहस्रधारं शतधारमुत्समक्षितं व्यच्यमानं सलिलस्य पृष्ठे ।
ऊर्जं दुहानमनपस्फुरन्तमुपासते पितरः स्वधाभिः ॥

AV XVIII.4.36

Beside the spring with hundred, thousand currents, expanding on the summit of the water,
Exhaustless, yielding strength, never reluctant, the Fathers with their sacred food are seated. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

These *mantras* are used in rites for the ancestors:

ऊर्जं वहन्तीरमृतं घृतं पयः कीलालं परिस्रुतम् ।
स्वधा स्थ तर्पयत मे पितॄन् ॥

YV II.34

Bearers of vigour and immortal fatness, milk and sweet beverage and foaming liquor, ye are a freshening draught. Delight my Fathers. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

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The waters are generally invoked for blessings:

शं न आपो धन्वन्याः शमु सन्त्वनूप्याः ।
शं नः खनित्रिमा आपः शमु याः कुम्भ आभृताः शिवा नः सन्तु वार्षिकीः ॥

AV I.6.4

The waters bless us, all that rise in desert lands or marshy pools;
Bless us the Waters dug from earth, bless us the waters brought in jars, bless us the Waters of the Rains! (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

The purifying power of the Waters is never limited to a merely physical cleansing, it always involves an inner purification from sin, as in all the rites of ritual bath (*snāna*):

इदमापः प्र वहत यत् किं च दुरितं मयि ।
यद् वाहमभिदुद्रोह यद् वा शेप उतानृतम् ॥

ṚV I.23.22

Whatever sin is found in me
Whatever evil I have wrought,
If I have lied or falsely sworn,
Waters, remove it far from me. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

The Waters are praised as divine in the context of the sacrifice, where they are of foremost importance:

आपो देवीरग्रेपुवो अग्रेगुवोऽग्र इमं यज्ञं नयताग्रे यज्ञपतिं धत्त... ।

TSam I.1.5.1

Ye divine waters, that go in front and first purify, forward lead this sacrifice, place in front the lord of the sacrifice. (Tr. A.B. Keith)

The victim of the sacrifice for Agni and Soma is addressed thus:

अपां पेरुरसि स्वात्तं चित्सदेवँ हव्यमापो देवीः स्वदते ... ।

TSam I.3.8.1

Thou art a drinker of the waters.
Ye divine waters, make it palatable, a very palatable offering for the gods. (Tr. A.B. Keith)

And the waters are addressed:

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आपो देवीः शुद्धायुवः शुद्धा यूयं देवाँ ऊड्ढ्वँ शुद्धा वयं परिविष्टाः परिवेष्टारो वो भूयास्म ॥

TSam I.3.8.2

O ye waters, goddesses, purifying
and pure, do ye bring the gods,
may we, pure and served (by you),
be servers upon you. (Tr. A.B. Kaith)

And it is said:

हविष्मतीरिमा आपो ... ।

TSam I.3.12

These waters are rich in oblation. (Tr. A.B. Keith)

The waters are called divine (*devī*), vast (*bṛhatī*) and all-beneficial (*viśvaśambhu*, TSam I.2.2). They can purify everything and correct any mistake committed in the sacrifice. They can heal the wounds inflicted on the earth while digging. Beyond them only *brahman* has the power to purify:

ब्रह्मवादिनो वदन्त्यङ्गिर्हवींषि प्रौक्षीः केनाप इति ब्रह्मणेति ब्रूयादङ्गिर्ह्येव हवींषि प्रोक्षति ब्रह्मणाऽप इध्माबर्हिः प्रोक्षति मेध्यमेवैनत्करोति ... । क्रूरमिव वा एतत् करोति यत् खनत्यपो नि नयति शान्त्यै ... ।

TSam II.6.5.1–2

The theologians say, 'Thou hast sprinkled the offerings with water; but the water with what?' 'with the holy power (Brahman)', he should say, for verily he sprinkles the offerings with water, and the waters with the holy power (Brahman). He sprinkles the kindling-wood and the sacrificial strew; verily he makes it pure....
Cruelly indeed does he act in that he digs. He pours down the waters, for healing. (Tr. A.B. Keith)

Because of their great sacrificial importance, the waters are equated with all the gods (*āpo vai sarvā devatā devatābhireva yajñaṃ saṃ tanvanti*, TSam II.6.8). Water being all-pervasive is also identified with *brahman*:

आपो वा इदँ सर्वमिति ब्राह्मणं विज्ञायते ब्रह्म वा आपो यदाप उपधीयन्ते ब्रह्म वै तदात्मन्धत्ते ब्रह्मणः सायुज्यँ सलोकतामाप्नोति य एतमग्निं चिनुत इति ।

BauŚrSū XIX.10

"This is all water" thus says the Brāhmaṇa. "Brahman is the water

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since the water is rested upon (Brahman). Brahman, indeed, holds it in the self. He, who piles up this Agni (Āruṇaketa) attains intimate union with Brahman and resides in the same world (where Brahman is). (Tr. V.A. Kulkarny)

The Brāhmaṇas are quite explicit about the role of the waters in cosmogony, in the sacrifice, in relation to the gods and to the elements of nature. Cosmogonic texts either present water as the source and beginning of creation, or as the first created element.

आपो वा इदमासन्थ्सलिलमेव । स प्रजापतिरेकः पुष्करपर्णे समभवत् । तस्यान्तर्मनसि कामस्समवर्तत । इदं सृजेयमिति ।

TĀr I.23.1

(In the beginning) the waters were the primordial water (as a source). That Prajāpati alone came into being on a lotus leaf. In his inner mind arose desire: Let me create. (Tr. Sadananda)

If the waters are created by Prajāpati, it is either with the help of the Word (*vāc*), or by means of *tapas*.

सोऽपोऽसृजत-वाच एव लोकात् । वागेवास्य साऽसृज्यत । सेदं सर्वमाप्नोत्-यदिदं किञ्च । यदाप्नोत्-तस्मादापः । यदवृणोत्-तस्माद्वाः ॥

ŚBr VI.1.1.9

He (Prajāpati) created the waters out of *Vāk* (speech, that is the world; for speech belonged to him: that was created (set free). It pervaded everything here; and because it pervaded (*ap*) whatsoever there was here, therefore (it is called) water (*āpaḥ*); and because it covered (*var*), therefore also it (is called) water (*vār*). (Tr. J. Eggeling)

In this passage, two 'etymologies' of words denoting water are used in order to describe the nature of water as pervading (*ap*) and covering all, because it spreads (*var*).

प्रजापतिर्वाऽइदमग्र आसीत्-एक एव सोऽकामयत-स्यां प्रजायेयेति । सोऽश्राम्यत् । स तपोऽतप्यत । तस्माच्छ्रान्तात्तेपानादापोऽसृज्यन्त । तस्मात्पुरुषात्तप्तादापो जायन्ते ॥

ŚBr VI.1.3.1

Verily, Prajāpati alone was here in the beginning. He desired, 'May I exist, may I reproduce myself!' He toiled, he practised austerity

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(or, became heated). From him, worn out and heated, the waters were created: from that heated person the waters are born. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

Just as Prajāpati creates the waters by means of his inner heat and ascetic fervour (*tapas*), sweat is produced out of heat in the human body.

In the order of creation, only truth (*satya*) and *brahman* are beyond the waters, since "Heaven is established on the mid-space, the mid-space on the earth, the earth on the waters, the waters on truth, and truth on *brahman*". (AitBr XI.6.4). *Brahman* in turn is established on *tapas*, because of its creative power. But truth (*satya*) is also identified with water, which reveals the double nature of Varuṇa as god of water and of truth:

तद्यत्तत्सत्यम् - आप एव तत् । आपो हि वै सत्यम् । तस्माद्येनापो यन्ति - तत्सत्यस्य रूपमित्याहुः । अप एव तदस्य सर्वस्याग्रमकुर्वन् । तस्माद्यदैवापो यन्ति - अथेदं सर्वं जायते - यदिदं किं च ॥

ŚBr VII.4.1.6

Now that truth is the same as the waters, for the waters are the truth. Hence they say, whereby the waters flow, that is a form of the truth.' It is the waters indeed that were made first of this universe: hence when the waters (rains) flow, then everything whatsoever exists is produced here. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

Water is closely connected with the sacrifice, and we can give here only its most important features. The shortest explanation of the nature of water is given in this sentence:

अथाप उपस्पृशति । शान्तिरापः । तदद्भिः शमयति ॥

ŚBr I.7.4.9

Thereupon he (the sacrificer) touches water: water is (a means) of appeasement, hence he appeases by means of water.

The foremost function of water in ritual is purification:

व्रतमुपैष्यन्नन्तरेणाहवनीयं च गार्हपत्यं च प्राङ् तिष्ठन्नप उपस्पृशति । तद्यदप उपस्पृशति अमेध्यो वै पुरुषो यदनृतं वदति, तेन पूतिरन्तरतः । मेध्या वा आपः । मेध्यो भूत्वा व्रतमुपायानीति । पवित्रं वा आपः । पवित्रपूतो व्रतमुपायानीति । तस्माद्वा अप उपस्पृशति ।

ŚBr I.1.1.1

He, who is about to enter the vow, touches water, whilst standing

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between the Āhavanīya and Gārhapatya fires, with his face turned towards east. The reason why he touches water is, that man is (sacrificially) impure on account of speaking untruth; and because by that act an internal purification (is effected), – for water is indeed (sacrificially) pure. After becoming sacrificially pure, I will enter on the vow, thus (he thinks); for water is indeed purifying. 'Having become purified through the purifying one, I will enter on the vow' thus (he thinks and) this is the reason why he touches water.
(Tr. J. Eggeling)

Initiation (*dīkṣā*), which renders the sacrificer ritually pure, is bestowed by means of a ritual bath. It is even said that "the gods, before ascending to heaven, made initiation pass through the waters" (*apsu dīkṣāṃ praveśayitvā devāḥ svargaṃ lokam āyan*, MaitSam III.6.2).

Water enlivens, therefore it is identified with the vital breaths (→*prāṇa*, Vol. I):

आपो वै प्राणाः । तदस्मिन्नेतान् प्राणान् दधाति । तथैतज्जीवमेव देवानां हविर्भवति, अमृतममृतानाम् ॥

ŚBr III.8.2.4

Now the vital airs are water; hence she (sacrificer's wife) now puts into it those vital airs, and thus that food of the gods becomes truly living, becomes immortal for the immortals. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

Water is strength or vigour (*vīrya*, cf. ŚBr V.3.4.1). Sacrifice itself is identified with water (ŚBr III.8.5.1 *āpo vai yajñaḥ*). In the case of animal sacrifice, its blood is said to be the cause that makes water flow (*tenaiva tadrasenāpaḥ spandante, tamevaitadrasaṃ spandamānaṃ manyante*, ŚBr III.9.2.1). But it is the complementarity of Agni and Āpaḥ, fire and water, which makes the sacrifice fruitful and effective:

अथाङ्गिरभ्युक्षति । एष वा अपां सम्भारो यदङ्गिरभ्युक्षति । तद् यद् – अपः सम्भरति – अन्नं वा आपः – अन्नं हि वा आपस्तस्माद् यदेमं लोकमाप आगच्छन्ति अथेहान्नाद्यं जायते । तदन्नाद्येनैवैनमेतत् समर्द्धयति ॥
योषा वा आपः, वृषाग्निः । मिथुनेनैवैनमेतत् प्रजननेन समर्द्धयति । अङ्गिर्वा इदं सर्वमासम् । अङ्गिरेवैनमेतदास्वाधत्ते – तस्मादपः सम्भरति ॥

ŚBr II.1.1.3–4

He (the Adhvaryu) then sprinkles (the lines) with water. When he thus sprinkles (the fire-place) with water, that is the equipment (of the fire) with water. The reason why he brings water is that water

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is food; for water is indeed food: hence when water comes to this world food is produced here. Thus he thereby supplies it (the fire) with food.

Water (*apa*, fem.), moreover, is female, and fire (*agni*, masc.) is male. So that he thereby supplies the latter with a productive mate. And since all this (universe) is pervaded (or obtained, *āpta*) by water he sets up the fire, after he has obtained it by means of water. This is why he brings water. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

Waters are related to the sacred nectar, *soma*, and hence they are called immortal (*amṛta*, MaitSam IV.1.9; GoBr II.1.3, etc.).

In the order of nature, the waters produce food (*āpo vā annasyāyataḥ*, ŚāṅkhĀr I.4), and they are the sap of plants:

आपो ह् वा ओषधीनां रसः । ... औषधय उहा अपां रसः । तस्मादापः पीताः केवल्यो न धिन्वन्ति ।

ŚBr III.6.1.7

For the essence (sap) of plants is water... the essence of water, on the other hand, are the plants; wherefore the water when drunk alone does not satiate. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

Terrestrial waters are described as being of five kinds: well water (*kūpya*), rivers (*nadī*), ocean (*samudra*), ponds, and frozen water (TBr III.1.2.3–4). Especially running water is said to be protective (ŚBr III.9.2.5), and beneficial (*śivā hy āpaḥ*, ŚBr III.9.4.16). Ultimately, water can heal both the body and the earth (cf. ŚBr III.6.1.19); and hence, it has an important ecological function. Hardly is there any mention of water itself being polluted, since it is the very means to remove pollution.

In the Upaniṣads, the cosmogonic role of water continues to be fundamental. The **Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad** gives an interesting account:

नैवेह किंचनाग्र आसीत् । मृत्युनैवेदमावृतमासीदशनायया । अशनाया हि मृत्युः । तन्मनोऽकुरुताऽऽत्मन्वी स्यामिति । सोऽर्चन्नचरत् । तस्यार्चत आपोऽजायन्त । ...

आपो वा अर्कः । तद्यदपां शर आसीत् तत् समहन्यत । सा पृथिव्यभवत् । तस्यामश्राम्यत् । तस्य शान्तस्य तप्तस्य तेजोरसो निरवर्तताग्निः ॥

... द्यौः पृष्ठमन्तरिक्षमुदरमियमुरः । स एषोऽप्सु प्रतिष्ठितः । यत्र क्व चैति तदेव प्रतितिष्ठत्येवं विद्वान् ॥

BṛUp I.2.1–3

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In the beginning there was nothing here whatsoever. All this was swathed in Death – in Hunger, for hunger indeed is death. Then he resolved to himself: "Would that I had a self!" So he moved around in worship. While he was worshipping, water was born.

The water, verily, was brightness. That which was the froth of the water became solidified. That became the earth. On it he (i.e. Death) tortured himself (*śram*). When he had tortured himself and practised austerity, his heat (*tejas*) and essence (*rasa*) turned into fire.

... The sky is the back. The atmosphere is the belly. This (earth) is the chest. He stands firm in the waters. He who knows this, stands firm wherever he goes. (Based on the tr. by R.E. Hume)

We find another account in the **Aitareya Upaniṣad**:

आत्मा वा इदमेक एवाग्र आसीत् । नान्यत् किंचन मिषत् । स ईक्षत-लोकान्नु सृजा इति ॥

स इमाँल्लोकानसृजताम्भो मरीचीर्मरमापः । अदोऽम्भः परेण दिवम् । द्यौः प्रतिष्ठा । अन्तरिक्षं मरीचयः । पृथिवी मरः । या अधस्तात्ता आपः ॥

... सोऽद्भ्य एव पुरुषं समुद्धृत्यामूर्च्छयत् ॥

AitUp I.1.1–3

In the beginning this was only one, the Self – no other thing that blinks whatever. He thought to himself: "Let me now create the worlds!"

He created the worlds of water, rays of light, death, and the waters: Heaven and beyond is the world of water; the sky above is the world of light; this earth of us mortals is the world of death; what lies below is the world of waters.

Right (*eva*) from the waters he (Ātman) drew forth and shaped a person. (Tr. R. Panikkar)

सोऽपोऽभ्यतपत् । ताभ्योऽभितप्ताभ्यो मूर्तिरजायत । या वै सा मूर्तिरजायतान्नं वै तत् ॥

AitUp I.3.2

He brooded upon the waters. From them, when they had been brooded upon, a material form (*mūrti*) was produced. Verily, that material form which was produced – verily, that is food. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

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In the instruction of Nārada by Sanatkumāra on the different realities meditated upon as Brahman, water is placed between food (*anna*) and heat (*tejas*):

> आपो वावान्नाद् भूयस्यः । तस्माद्यदा सुवृष्टिर्न भवति व्याधीयन्ते प्राणा अन्नं कनीयो भविष्यतीति । अथ यदा सुवृष्टिर्भवत्यानन्दिनः प्राणा भवन्त्यन्नं बहु भविष्यतीति । आप एवेमा मूर्ता येयं पृथिवी यदन्तरिक्षं यद् द्यौर्यत्पर्वता यद्देवमनुष्या यत्पशवश्च वयाँसि च तृणवनस्पतयः श्वापदान्याकीटपतङ्गपिपीलकम् । आप एवेमा मूर्ताः । अप उपास्स्वेति ॥
>
> स योऽपो ब्रह्मेत्युपास्ते । आप्नोति सर्वान् कामाँस्तृप्तिमान् भवति । यावदपां गतं तत्रास्य यथाकामचारो भवति योऽपो ब्रह्मेत्युपास्ते ।
>
> ChUp VII.10.1–2

'Water (*āpas*), verily, is more than Food. Therefore, when there is not a good rain, living creatures (*prāṇa*) sicken with the thought, "Food will become scarce." But when there is a good rain, living creatures become happy with the thought, "Food will become abundant." It is just Water solidified that is this earth, that is the atmosphere, that is the sky, that is gods and men, beasts and birds, grass and trees, animals together with worms, flies, and ants; all these are just Water solidified. Reverence Water.

He who reverences Water (*āpas*) as Brahma obtains (*āpnoti*) all his desires and becomes satisfied. As far as Water goes, so far he has unlimited freedom, he who reverences Water as Brahma.' (Tr. R.E. Hume)

However, a major change seems to have taken place regarding the sequence in which the elements emerged. Water lost its primary place in cosmogony, and *ākāśa* (space) became the first element. The view of the creation of the elements as described in the **Taittirīya Upaniṣad** became predominant, which moves from the subtle to the gross (→*sūkṣma, sthūla*):

> तस्माद्वा एतस्मादात्मन आकाशः संभूतः । आकाशाद्वायुः । वायोरग्निः । अग्नेरापः । अद्भ्यः पृथिवी । पृथिव्या ओषधयः । ओषधीभ्योऽन्नम् । अन्नात्पुरुषः ।
>
> TUp II.1

From this Soul (Ātman), verily, space (*ākāśa*) arose; from space, wind (*vāyu*), from wind, fire; from fire, water; from water the earth; from the earth, herbs; from herbs, food; from food, the person (*puruṣa*). (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The →*ātman* or the →*puruṣa* (Vol.I) are then the source of the creation of the human person and of the cosmos:

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एतस्माज्जायते प्राणो मनः सर्वेन्द्रियाणि च ।
खं वायुर्ज्योतिरापः पृथिवी विश्वस्य धारिणी ॥
अतः समुद्रा गिरयश्च सर्वेऽस्मात्स्यन्दन्ते सिन्धवः सर्वरूपाः ।
अतश्च सर्वा ओषधयो रसश्च येनैष भूतैस्तिष्ठते ह्यन्तरात्मा ॥

MuṇḍUp II.1.3,9

From him is produced breath (*prāṇa*)
Mind (*manas*) and all the senses (*indriya*),
Space (*kha*), wind, light, water
And earth, the supporter of all.

From Him, the seas and the mountains all,
From Him roll rivers of every kind.
And from Him all herbs, the essence too
whereby, that Inner Soul (*antarātman*) dwells in beings. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The immanence of the *ātman* in all things is at the centre of the Upaniṣadic meditations:

योऽप्सु तिष्ठन्नद्भ्योऽन्तरो यमापो न विदुर्यस्यापः शरीरं योऽपोऽन्तरो यमयत्येष त आत्माऽन्तर्याम्यमृतः ॥

BṛUp III.7.4

He who, dwelling in the waters, yet is other than the waters, whom the waters do not know, whose body the waters are, who controls the waters from within – He is your Soul, the Inner Controller, the Immortal. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

In the discussion between Gārgī and Yājñavalkya on the reality pervading the cosmos, that leads ultimately to *brahman*, water is the first element mentioned:

... यदिदँ सर्वमप्स्वोतं च प्रोतं च कस्मिन्नु खल्वाप ओताश्च प्रोताश्चेति ।
वायौ गार्गीति ।

BṛUp III.6.1

(Gārgī asked Yājñavalkya) 'Since all this world is woven, warp and woof, on water. On what pray, is the water woven, warp and woof?' (Yājñavalkya replied) 'On Wind O Gārgī'. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The Upaniṣads are preoccupied with the unification of all the cosmic elements, which is often expressed by the term *rasa*, essence or 'juice', a term closely related to *āpaḥ*. The human person is also said to be the essence of the elements:

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एषां भूतानां पृथिवी रसः । पृथिव्या आपो रसः । अपामोषधयो रसः । ओषधीनां पुरुषो रसः ।

ChUp I.1.2

The essence of things here is the earth,
The essence of the earth is water.
The essence of water is plants
The essence of plants is a person. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

The conception that the body is dependent on food (*anna*) and food on water (*āpaḥ*), is part of the interdependence of all things, including the human body. But water is even more essential for the sustenance of the body than food (ChUp VI.7.1). It is also water which helps to digest food (ChUp VII.8.3). Just as Agni and Soma, fire and water, are complementary in the Veda, water and light or fire are mutually related:

... आपो वा अन्नम् । ज्योतिरन्नादम् । अप्सु ज्योतिः प्रतिष्ठितम् । ज्योतिष्यापः प्रतिष्ठिताः ।

TUp III.8

Water, verily is food. Light is an eater of food. Light is established on water; water is established on light. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

अन्नेन शुङ्गेनापोमूलमन्विच्छ । अद्भिः सोम्य शुङ्गेन तेजोमूलमन्विच्छ ।

ChUp VI.8.4

With food for a sprout, look for water as the root. With water, my dear, as a sprout, look for heat as the root. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

In one of the accounts of the origin of the world, Being (*sat*) is said to be in the beginning, one without a second. It desires to create and become many. It first brought forth fiery energy (*tejas*, →*jyotis*), and this in turn brings forth water:

... तत्तेज ऐक्षत । बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति । तदपोऽसृजत । तस्माद्यत्र क्व च शोचति स्वेदते वा पुरुषस्तेजस एव तदध्यापो जायन्ते ॥

ता आप ऐक्षन्त - बह्व्यः स्याम प्रजायेमहीति । ता अन्नमसृजन्त । तस्माद्यत्र क्व च वर्षति तदेव भूयिष्ठमन्नं भवति । अद्भ्य एव तदध्यन्नाद्यं जायते ॥

ChUp VI.2.3–4

That heat bethought itself: "Would that I were many! Let me procreate myself." It emitted water. Therefore whenever a person grieves

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or perspires from the heat, then water (i.e. either tears or perspiration) is produced.

That water bethought itself: "Would that I were many! Let me procreate myself." It emitted food. Therefore whenever it rains, then there is abundant food. So food for eating is produced just from water. (Tr. R.E. Hume)

But the waters are not only at the origin of life and sustaining life (*sṛṣṭi* and *sthiti*), they are also the element in which everything merges in the end (*pralaya*). One of the metaphors, leading to the insight into the subtle essence, the Self of everything (→*ātman*, Vol. I), is more than a simile:

इमाः सोम्य नद्यः पुरस्तात्प्राच्यः स्यन्दन्ते पश्चात्प्रतीच्यः । ताः समुद्रात्समुद्रमेवापियन्ति । स समुद्र एव भवति । ता यथा तत्र न विदुरियमहमस्मीयमहमस्मीति ॥
एवमेव खलु सोम्येमाः सर्वाः प्रजाः सत आगम्य न विदुः सत आगच्छामह इति । त इह व्याघ्रो वा सिँहो वा वृको वा वराहो वा कीटो वा पतङ्गो वा दँशो वा मशको वा यद्यद्भवन्ति तदाभवन्ति ॥
स य एषोऽणिमैतदात्म्यमिदँ सर्वम् । तत्सत्यम् । स आत्मा । तत्त्वमसि श्वेतकेतो इति ... ॥

ChUp VI.10.1–3

'These rivers, my dear, flow, the eastern toward the east, the western toward the west. They go just from the ocean to the ocean. They become the ocean itself. As there they know not "I am this one," "I am that one"– even so, indeed, my dear, all creatures here, though they have come forth from Being, know not "We have come forth from Being." Whatever they are in this world, whether tiger, or lion, or wolf, or boar, or worm, or fly, or gnat, or mosquito, that they become.

That which is the finest essence – this whole world has that as its soul. That is Reality. That is Ātman (Soul). That art thou, Śvetaketu.' (Tr. R.E. Hume)

A variation of the same metaphor is used by the **Bhagavad-Gītā** in the context of the description of the *sthitaprajña*, the person of steadfast wisdom:

आपूर्यमाणमचलप्रतिष्ठं
समुद्रमापः प्रविशन्ति यद्वत् ।
तद्वत्कामा यं प्रविशन्ति सर्वे
स शान्तिमाप्नोति न कामकामी ॥

BhG II.70

As the waters flow into the sea, full filled, whose ground remains

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unmoved, so too do all desires flow into (the heart of) man: and such a man wins peace, – not the desirer of desires. (Tr. R.C. Zaehner)

Water is one of the elements of →*prakṛti* in its eightfold forms in the **Gītā**, just as in Śaivism they constitute the *aṣṭamūrti* of Śiva:

भूमिरापोऽनलो वायुः खं मनो बुद्धिरेव च ।
अहंकार इतीयं मे भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्टधा ॥

BhG VII.4

Eightfold divided is my Nature, – thus: earth, water, fire and air, space, mind, and also soul – and the ego. (Tr. R.C. Zaehner)

But more important is the immanence of the Lord in all, which bestows on all the elements their true nature. This revelation starts with the enlivening divine presence in water:

रसोऽहमप्सु कौन्तेय प्रभाऽस्मि शशिसूर्ययोः ।

BhG VII.8ab

O son of Kuntī, I am the flavour (essence) of water, I am the splendour of sun and moon.

Here the difference between *rasa* and *ap* is clear, the first being explained as *sāra*, 'essence', by Śaṅkara. Most commentators explain *rasa* simply as the quality inherent in water, illustrating the divine immanence (*kena kena dharmeṇa viśiṣṭe tvayi sarvamidam protam*, ŚBh), but Abhinavagupta gives a deeper interpretation: 'I am that generic (sense of taste) which is being savoured everywhere and in which the distinctions of sweetness etc., have not yet arisen' (*sarvatrāsvādyamāno yo'nudbhinnamadhurādivibhāgāḥ sāmānyaḥ so'ham*, tr. A. Sharma).

In the sense of the cosmic element the **Gītā** uses the word *ap*, clearly distinguishing it from particular water. The latter sense of *toya* is found for example in the offerings pleasing to the Lord:

पत्रं पुष्पं फलं तोयं यो मे भक्त्या प्रयच्छति ।

BhG IX.26ab

Be it a leaf or flower or fruit or water that a zealous soul may offer Me with love's devotion, ... (Tr. R.C. Zaehner)

In the case of the forms of water, the Lord says: "Of lakes I am the ocean" (*sarasāṃ asmi sāgaraḥ*, BhG X.24).

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The **Mahābhārata** contains some interesting references to water. The capacity of water to extinguish fire is a characteristic which leads to a reflection on the universal significance of water:

य एष मन्युजस्तेऽग्निर्लोकानादातुमिच्छति ।
अप्सु तं मुञ्च भद्रं ते लोका ह्यप्सु प्रतिष्ठिताः ॥
आपोमयाः सर्वरसाः सर्वमापोमयं जगत् ।
तस्मादप्सु विमुञ्चेमं क्रोधाग्निं द्विजसत्तम ॥

MBh I.171.17–18

(Pitṛs replied, saying-) O throw this fire that is born of thy wrath and that desireth to consume the worlds, into the waters. That will do thee good. The worlds, indeed are all dependent on water (as their elementary cause). Every juicy substance contains water: Indeed, the whole universe is made of water. Therefore, O thou best of Brāhmaṇas, cast thou this fire of thy wrath into the waters. (Tr. P.C. Roy)

The life-sustaining nature of water is equally stressed:

यत्प्राणाः सर्वभूतानां वर्धन्ते येन च प्रजाः ।
परित्यक्ताश्च नश्यन्ति तेनेदं सर्वमावृतम् ॥

MBh XII.176.3

Water is the life of all creatures, and it helps their growth. If there be no water, all creatures would die. The entire universe is pervaded by water. (Tr. M.N. Dutt)

The Purāṇas contain references to water in a cosmological, theological and natural context. There is an etymological pun with the word *nārā*, denoting waters, that relates it to Nārāyaṇa:

आपो नारा इति प्रोक्ता आपो वै नरसूनवः ।
अयनं तस्य ताः पूर्वं तेन नारायणः स्मृतः ॥

ViPur I.4.6

The waters are called Nārā, because they were the offspring of Nara (the supreme spirit); and as in them his first (Ayana) progress (in the character of Brahmā) took place, he is thence named Nārāyaṇa (he whose place of moving was the waters). (Tr. H.H. Wilson)

The same definition is found in the **Manu Smṛti** (I.10). Similarly, Viṣṇu is eulogized in the form of water:

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यद् योनिभूतं जगतो बीजं यत् सर्वदेहिनाम् ।
तत् तोयरूपमीशस्य नमामो हरिमेधसः ॥

ViPur I.14.29

We adore that form of the deity Hari which is water, the womb of the world, the seed of all living beings. (Tr. H.H. Wilson)

The **Bhāgavata Purāṇa** explains the name *Nārāyaṇa* in connection with water, since Viṣṇu dwells in the ocean (cf. also Manu I.10):

तास्ववात्सीत् स्वसृष्टासु सहस्रपरिवत्सरान् ।
तेन नारायणो नाम यदापः पुरुषोद्भवाः ॥

BhāgPur II.10.11

That Supreme Person is not impersonal and therefore is distinctively a *nara*, or person. Therefore the transcendental water created from the Supreme Nara is known as *nāra*. And because He lies down on that water, He is known as Nārāyaṇa. (Tr. Prabhupada)

Some of the views regarding natural phenomena such as rain may be mentioned:

विवस्वानष्टभिर्मासैरादायापो रसात्मिकाः ।
वर्षत्यम्बु ततश्चान्नमन्नादप्यखिलं जगत् ॥

ViPur II.9.8

During eight months of the year the Sun attracts the waters, which are the essence of all fluids, and then pours them upon the earth (during the other four months) as rain. From rain grows corn; and on corn the whole world subsists. (Tr. H.H. Wilson)

The qualities of water are described as follows:

क्लेदनं पिण्डनं तृप्तिः प्राणानाप्यायनोदनम् ।
तापापनोदो भूयस्त्वमम्भसो वृत्तयस्त्विमाः ॥

BhāgPur III.26.43

The characteristics of water are exhibited by its moistening other substances, coagulating various mixtures, causing satisfaction, maintaining life, softening things, driving away heat, incessantly supplying itself to reservoirs of water and refreshing by slaking thirst. (Tr. Prabhupada)

According to the **Mahābhārata**, the properties of water are sound, touch, vision and taste (*śabda, sparśa, rūpa* and *rasa*, MBh XII.177.29).

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Water is said to be produced out of light (*jyotis, tejas*, cf. Manu I.78), and to possess the quality of taste (*rasoguṇa*, e.g. AgPur 368.20).

ज्योतिश्चापि विकुर्वाणं रसमात्रं ससर्ज ह् ॥
संभवन्ति ततोऽम्भांसि रसाधाराणि तानि च ।

ViPur I.2.41cd–42ab

Light becoming productive, produced the rudiment of taste; whence proceed all juices in which flavour resides. (Tr. H.H. Wilson)

तेजसस्तु विकुर्वाणादासीदम्भो रसात्मकम् ।
रूपवत् स्पर्शवच्चाम्भो घोषवच्च परान्वयात् ॥

BhāgPur II.5.28

Since fire is also transformed, there is a manifestation of water, full of juice and taste. As previously, it also has form and touch and is also full of sound. (Tr. Prabhupada)

According to another purāṇic cosmogony, water was first produced by the creator:

ततः स्वयंभूर्भगवान् सिसृक्षुर्विविधाः प्रजाः ॥
अप एव ससर्जादौ तासु वीर्यमवासृजत् ।

AgPur XVII.6cd–7ab

Afterwards the self-existing Lord, desiring to create beings of various kinds, created waters in the beginning and placed (his) seed in them.

In the Āgamas and Tantras, water is discussed as a *tattva* in the context of cosmology/cosmogony, in ritual and yoga. According to the view that the gross (*sthūla: bhūta*) emerges from the subtle (*sūkṣma: tanmātra*), water is said to arise from the *rasa-tanmātra*:

तोयं यद्रसतन्मात्रात्संक्षुब्धात्कारणेच्छया ॥
व्यक्तं लोकोपकाराय तच्चैवाणोश्चतुर्गुणम् ।

MPĀ vp XXII.1cd–2ab

It is by the will of the primal cause that water emerges out of the disturbance caused in the subtle element of *rasa*. For the good of the world it becomes manifest to the limited soul with four qualities (sound, touch, form and taste). (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

The same idea is found in the Vaiṣṇava Saṃhitās:

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जायते रसमात्रं तु जायन्तेऽम्भांसि वै ततः ॥
जायन्तेऽथ गुणास्तेषां रसस्नेहद्रवादयः ।

AhSam VII.34cd–35ab

From *ahaṃkāra* the subtle element of *rasa* evolves from which water is born. Its qualities, viz. taste, oiliness and liquidity and others are also born in it. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

After the dissolution of the world, the fire of Kālāgnirudra burns all the seven *lokas*, and remains as mere being in the abode of Brahmā. Due to extreme heat Brahmā begins to perspire. Water is created out of his perspiration and takes the form of a great ocean.

ब्रह्मप्रस्वेदजं वारि तज्जगत्प्लावयेत् पुनः ।
तेनैव वारिणा देवि जगदेकार्णवं भवेत् ॥

SvT XI.244

Then again, water emerged from the perspiration of Brahmā inundates the entire world. O goddess, with that water the world becomes a single ocean. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

The ritual use and symbolism of water will be treated briefly in the section on 'Process'. In fact, there are many common elements between the Vedic, Purāṇic and Āgamic forms of ritual.

In the encyclopaedic literature, the **Bṛhat Saṃhitā** contains long lists of potents connected with water, methods of finding springs and places for digging wells, etc.

सलिलोत्पत्तिरखाते गन्धरसविपर्यये च तोयानाम् ।
सलिलाशयविकृतौ वा महद्भयं तत्र शान्तिमिमाम् ॥
सलिलविकारे कुर्यात् पूजां वरुणस्य वारुणैर्मन्त्रैः ।

BṛSam XLVI.50–51ab

If water springs up from the earth that has not been dug, if water acquires a different smell or taste, and if some unnatural features are seen in tanks etc., there will be great disaster. The following is the expiatory method to be adopted in the above cases.

When any unnatural feature is observed with respect to water Varuṇa should be worshipped with Vedic hymns relating to Him. (Tr. M.R. Bhat)

The same text gives characteristics of different kinds of people, among whom are those of 'watery nature' (*toyasvabhāva*):

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तोयस्वभावो बहुतोयपायी प्रियाभिभाषी रसभाजनश्च ॥

BṛSam LXVIII.109cd

One of watery nature drinks plenty of water, speaks sweetly and enjoys delicious and beautiful things. (Tr. M.R. Bhat)

The **Abhilaṣitārthacintāmaṇi** of Someśvara gives an encyclopedic account of various forms of water in nature:

पिपासायां च जातायां स्वेच्छया पीयते जलम् ।
नियमो नात्र कालस्य तृषावेगो न धार्यते ॥
असवः प्राणिनामापो जीवितं यत्तदाश्रितम् ।
मूर्छिता अपि जीवन्ति शीततोयेन सेचिताः ॥
दिव्यान्तरिक्षं नादेयं नैष्यन्दं सारसं जलम् ।
भौमं चौटं च ताटाकमौद्भिदं नवमं स्मृतम् ॥
स्वात्यां पयोदनिर्मुक्तं सूर्यरश्मिविमिश्रितम् ।
सर्वदोषापहं स्वादु दिव्यमित्युच्यते जलम् ॥
प्रावृट्जलदनिर्मुक्तमव्यक्तं स्वादु लक्षणम् ।
वारि स्फटिकसङ्काशमान्तरिक्षमिति स्मृतम् ॥
नद्यां शैलप्रसूतायामिन्द्रनीलसमप्रभम् ।
प्रशस्तभूमिभागस्थं नीरं नादेयमुच्यते ॥
वालुकासु करैर्गर्तं भित्वा यत्प्राप्यते जलम् ।
उत्क्षेपणेन नैर्मल्यं याति निष्यन्दजं हि तत् ॥
नद्याः शैलवराद्वापि स्रुतमेकत्र संस्थितम् ।
कुमुदाम्भोजसञ्छन्नं तोयं सारसमुच्यते ॥
वापीकूपसमुत्पन्नं नीलोत्पलदलप्रभम् ।
विमलं मधुरास्वादं भौममम्भोऽभिधीयते ॥
स्वयं दीर्घशिलाश्वभ्रेष्वतसीपुष्पसन्निभम् ।
निर्मलं मधुरं पथ्यं सलिलं चौटमिष्यते ॥
पालिबन्धेन संवृद्धं कुल्यापूरागतं जलम् ।
प्रतिवर्षं नवाम्भोभिः मिश्रं ताटाकमुच्यते ॥

Abhil XIV.1784–94

Water is drunk by one's own will when one feels thirsty. There is no rule regarding its time because ardent desire for water is unbearable. Water is the life of living beings. Life itself depends on it. Even a person who has fainted gets back his life when he is washed with cool water.

Water is of nine kinds: they are *divya* (celestial), *antarikṣa* (atmospherical), water of the river, of the fountain, of the lake, water under the soil, of a canal, of a large pond, of trees.

Water falling from the cloud during the constellation of *svāti* (the

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star *arcutarus*) when mixed with the rays of the sun is tasteful. It is the remover of all faults, therefore this kind of water is heavenly (*divya*). The water when falling from the rainy clouds and the taste of which is slightly sweet, and is crystal clear is known as the water of the sky. The water of the river born of mountains and the colour of which resembles that of the emerald and that which runs along the auspicious ground is that of the river. The water obtained by digging sands with hands when thrown above becomes clear is said to be water of the fountain.

The water which has flowed from a big mountain and remains in one place covered with lilies and lotuses is called the water of the lake. The water that is obtained in a pond and well and the colour of which is like a blue lotus, clean, sweet in taste, is called the water of the soil. The water that emerges from the stones automatically from long rocks of mountain top is called *cauṭa*. It is clear, sweet and wholesome. The water that is continuously filled in every year with new water through the cause way coming from canals into the dam, that mixed water is called the water of a pond or lake. (Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

In philosophical literature (Darśana) the element water is defined with its qualities.

In Śaṅkara's Vedānta, water is said to be subtle and to possess the qualities of colour, taste and touch (*rūparasasparśaguṇāḥ sūkṣmā āpaḥ*, BrSūBh II.2.16). In the order of creation of the elements, water is given after fire (*tejas*) following the order of the **Taittirīya Upaniṣad** quoted above:

आपः ॥

'अतस्तथाह्याह' इत्यनुवर्तते । आपोऽतस्तेजसो जायन्ते । कस्मात् । तथाह्याह – 'तदपोऽसृजत' इति 'अग्नेरापः' इति च । सति वचने नास्ति संशयः । तेजसस्तु सृष्टिं व्याख्याय पृथिव्या व्याख्यास्यन्नपोऽन्तरियामित्याप इति सूत्रयांबभूव ॥

BrSū with ŚBh II.3.11

Water (is produced from fire).

We have to supply from the preceding Sūtra the words 'thence' and 'for thus the text declares.' – Water is produced from fire; for the text says, 'it sent forth water' (ChUp VI.2.3), and 'from fire (sprang) water' (TUp II.1). These explicit statements allow no room for doubt. The Sūtrakāra, however, having explained the creation of fire, and being about to explain the creation of earth, propounds

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this Sūtra in order to insert water (and thus to point out its position in the *sṛṣṭikrama*). (Tr. G. Thibaut)

In the context of death and transmigration of the soul, water is said to be the predominent element:

त्र्यात्मकत्वात्तु भूयस्त्वात् ॥
... बाहुल्याच्चाप्शब्देन सर्वेषामेव देहबीजानां भूतसूक्ष्माणामुपादानम् ।

BrSū with ŚBh III.1.2

But on account of (water) consisting of three (elements) (the soul is enveloped not by water merely; the latter alone is, however, mentioned) on account of preponderance.

... And on account of that preponderance the word 'water' implies the subtle parts of all the elements which constitutes the seed of the body. (Tr. G. Thibaut)

The Vedānta view is also found in the **Pañcadaśī**, which stresses the unreal (*mithyā*) nature of the elements in relation to Brahman:

सतो विवेचिते वह्नौ मिथ्यात्वे सति वासिते ।
आपो दशांशतो न्यूनाः कल्पिता इति चिन्तयेत् ॥
सन्त्यापोऽमूः शून्यतत्त्वाः सशब्दस्पर्शसंयुताः ।
रूपवत्योऽन्य धर्मानुवृत्त्या स्वीयो रसो गुणः ॥

Pañcad II.91–92

Since the reality of fire as *Brahman* and its unreality apart from *Brahman* has been established, it is easy to understand the unreality of water apart from *Brahman*, since it consists of only one tenth part of fire.

Its existence, its pseudo-reality apart from existence, its perceptibility to the senses of sound, touch and sight are taken from the entities from which it is derived (namely *Brahman, Māyā, ākāśa*, air and fire respectively). Its specific property is perceptibility to the sense of taste. (Tr. Swahananda)

The Mīmāṃsā view of water is concerned with the ritual and hence we will deal with it in the context of process.

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika view deserves special consideration, because it deals more extensively with the properties and nature of the elements. According to these schools, water is of two kinds: eternal (*nitya*) and non-eternal (*anitya*),

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the first being of the nature of *paramāṇu* ('atomic'), the second being an effect or a composite form of the first. In the words of Praśastapāda:

> अप्त्वाभिसम्बन्धादापः । रूप-रस-स्पर्श-द्रवत्व-स्नेह-सङ्ख्या- परिमाण पृथक्त्व-संयोग- विभाग-परत्वापरत्व-गुरुत्व-संस्कारवत्यश्च । एते च पूर्ववत्सिद्धाः । शुक्लमधुरशीता एव रूपरसस्पर्शाः । स्नेहोम्भस्येव सांसिद्धिकं द्रवत्वञ्च । तास्तु पूर्ववद् द्विविधाः – नित्यानित्यभावात् । कार्यं पुनस्त्रिविधम् – शरीरेन्द्रियविषयसंज्ञकम् । शरीरमयोनिजमेव वरुणलोके पार्थिवावयवोपष्टम्भादुपभोगसमर्थम् । इन्द्रियं सर्वप्राणिनां रसोपलम्भकमन्यावयवानभिभूतैर्जलावयवैरारब्धं रसनम् । विषयस्तु सरित्समुद्रहिमकरकादिरिति ॥
>
> VaiśSūBh IV.2

Water is that which is comprised in the class 'water'. It has the following qualities: Colour, Taste, Touch, Fluidity, Viscidity, Number, Dimension, Separateness, Conjunction, Disjunction, Distance, Proximity, Gravity and Faculty. These also are indicated by the *sūtra* in the same way as the qualities of Earth.

The colour of water is white; its taste is sweet; its touch is cool. Viscidity belongs to the water alone; as also does natural Fluidity. Like Earth, Water also is of two kinds – eternal and noneternal. Its products are threefold, in the shape of the Body, the Sense-organ and the Object. The Body (of water) is one that is not born of the womb; and is known to exist only in the regions of Varuṇa. These aqueous bodies however are made capable of experiencing pleasure, pain etc., by the admixture of Earth-molecules. The aqueous sense-organ is the organ of Taste, which serves to make Taste perceptible by all living beings, and is made up of aqueous atoms only, without any part of the molecules of other substances. The aqueous Object exists in the shape of Rivers, Oceans, the Moon, Hails and the like. (Tr. G.N. Jha)

Śrīdhara in his **Nyāyakandalī** goes into great detail in explaining this section on *ap*. About the *indriya* he says that the sense-organ which makes taste perceptible itself consists of water-molecules. This conception is basic to the understanding of the sense of taste (→*indriya*, Vol. IV) and to the aesthetic experience (→*rasa*).

In the Āyurveda we find an exhaustive treatment of water, both as element in nature and in the human body. There are long descriptions of the different qualities of water which are essential for any system of medicine. For example, water in the different seasons has different characteristics which are either

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beneficial or harmful, as the case may be (cf. CarSam SūSthā XXVII.203–208). Moreover, water of various rivers has certain characteristcs which are pure and healing, or otllerwise causing certain diseases (cf. CarSam SūSthā XXVII.209–212). Polluted rivers are also described whose waters are harmful to health.

वसुधाकीटसर्पाखुमलसंदूषितोदकाः ।
वर्षाजलवहा नद्यः सर्वदोषसमीरणाः ॥

CarSam SūSthā XXVII.213

The rivers having water polluted with soil and faeces, insects, snakes and rats and carrying rainwater aggravate all *doṣas*. (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

The qualities of rain water, and of water originating from different sources and soils, are equally described (cf. CarSam SūSthā XXVII,198–202, 214–216).

In medicine proper, water is among the best healing agents:

उदकमाश्वासकराणाम् ...
जलं स्तम्भनीयानाम् ... ।

CarSam SūSthā XXV.40

Water is the best means of revival...
Water is the best one among those checking (sweats and other discharges). (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

The human body is constituted by watery substance:

तस्य पुरुषस्य ... आपः क्लेदः ... ।

CarSam SāSthā V.5

In the Person *ap* is represented by moisture.

शरीरे षट् त्वचः, तद्यथा - उदकधरा त्वग्बाह्या ... ।

CarSam ŚāSthā VII.4

There are six layers of skin in the body such as the outer layer of skin is known as *udakadharā* (that which holds up water). (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

The properties of the water element in the body are:

द्रवस्निग्धशीतमन्दमृदुपिच्छिलरसगुणबहुलान्याप्यानि,
तान्युपक्लेदस्नेहबन्धविष्यन्दमार्दवप्रह्लादकराणि ... ।

CarSam SūSthā XXVI.11

Those (*dravyas*) predominant in properties of liquid, unctuous, cold,

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dull, soft, slimy and taste are *āpya* (constituted predominantly by *ap bhūta*). They exert actions like moistening, unction, binding, oozing, softening and exhilaration. (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

From the element water are produced taste (*rasa*), the organ of taste (*rasana*), coldness, softness, unction and moistening (CarSam SāSthā IV.12). *Rasa* is an essential constituent of medical anthropology:

रसजानि तु भूतानि व्याधयश्च पृथग्विधाः ।
आपो हि रसवत्यस्ताः स्मृता निर्वृत्तिहेतवः ॥

CarSam SūSthā XXV.13

(In Vāryovida's view), the living beings are the products of *rasa* and so are the various disorders because *ap* is endowed with *rasa* and is known as the cause of manifestation. (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

Āyurveda knows six kinds of taste:

षडेव रसा इत्युवाच भगवानात्रेयः पुनर्वसुः मधुराम्ललवणकटुतिक्त-
कषायाः । तेषां षण्णां रसानां योनिरुदकम् ... ।

CarSam SūSthā XXVI.9

(After this) Lord Punarvasu Ātreya said – "*Rasas* are only six – *madhura* (sweet), *amla* (sour), *lavaṇa* (saline), *kaṭu* (pungent), *tikta* (bitter) and *kaṣāya* (astringent). Their primordial source is water." (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

The watery qualities are described in the **Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya** in the following way:

द्रवशीतगुरुस्निग्धमन्दसान्द्ररसोल्बणम् ॥
आप्यं स्नेहनविष्यन्दक्लेदप्रह्लादबन्धकृत् ।

AṣṭH SūSthā IX.6cd–7ab

The substance which possesses qualities such as *drava* (liquidity), *śīta* (cold), *guru* (heaviness), *snigdha* (unctuousness, moisture, oiliness), *manda* (dull), *sāndra* (thickness/dense), and predominent in *rasa* (taste) is *āpya* (watery). It confers lubrication (moistness), secretion (moisture production), *kleda* (keeping wet), satiation (contentment, satisfaction) and cohesion (binding, holding together). (Tr. K.R.S. Murthy)

These examples may suffice to show the importance of water in Āyurveda 1) as a natural element used for drinking and in various therapies,- 2) as a

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constituent of the human body, 3) as a cause of disease, 4) *rasadhātu* and the sense of taste as derived from *ap*. In fact, the birth of a human body depends on the right combination of factors connected with the water element:

ध्रुवं चतुर्णां सान्निध्याद्गर्भः स्याद्विधिपूर्वकम् ।
ऋतुक्षेत्राम्बुबीजानां सामग्र्यादङ्कुरो यथा ॥

SuSam ŚāSthā II.33

A co-ordination of the four factors of menstrual period (*ṛtu*), healthy womb (*kṣetra*), nutrient liquid i.e. chyle of digested food (*ambu*), healthy semen (*bīja*) and the proper observance of the rules is necessary for the conception and development of a healthy child just (as) the proper season (*ṛtu*), good soil (*kṣetra*), water (containing nutrient matter) and vigorous seeds (*bīja*) together with proper care, help the germination of strong and undiseased sprouts. (Tr. K.L Bhisagratna)

In Buddhist literature we find descriptions of the elements (→*dhātu* Vol. IV) with their qualities. *Āpodhātu* is both, internal and external. The internal element is in the body:

तत्थ कतमा - अज्झत्तिका आपोधातु?

यं अज्झत्तं पच्चत्तं आपो आपोगतं सिनेहो सिनेहगतं बन्धनत्तं रूपस्स अज्झत्तं उपादिन्नं, सेय्यथीदं - पित्तं सेम्हं पुब्बो लोहितं सेदो मेदो अस्सु वसा खेळो सिङ्घाणिका लसिका मुत्तं, यं वा पनञ्ञं पि अत्थि अज्झत्तं पच्चत्तं आपो आपोगतं सिनेहो सिनेहगतं बन्धनत्तं रूपस्स अज्झत्तं उपादिन्नं - अयं वुच्चति "अज्झत्तिका आपोधातु" ।

Vibh p. 103

Therein what is internal element of cohesion? That which is personal, self referable, water, fluid, viscid, viscous, cohesiveness of matter, internal, grasped. For example, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, lymph, saliva, nasal mucus, synovial fluid, urine; or whatever else there is, personal, self-referable, water, fluid, viscid, viscous, cohesiveness of matter, internal, grasped. This is called internal element of cohesion. (Tr. P.A. Thiṭṭila)

The external *āpodhātu* is underlying all liquid substances:

तत्थ कतमा बाहिरा आपोधातु?

यं बाहिरं आपो आपोगतं सिनेहो सिनेहगतं बन्धनत्तं रूपस्स बहिद्धा अनुपादिन्नं, सेय्यथीदं - मूलरसो खन्धरसो तचरसो पत्तरसो पुप्फरसो

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फलरसो खीरं दधि सप्पि नवनीतं तेलं मधु फाणितं भुम्मानि वा उदकानि अन्तलिक्खानि वा, यं वा पनञ्ञं पि अत्थि बाहिरं आपो आपोगतं सिनेहो सिनेहगतं बन्धनत्तं, रूपस्स बहिद्धा अनुपादिन्नं - अयं वुच्चति "बाहिरा आपोधातु" ।

या च अज्झत्तिका आपोधातु या च बाहिरा आपोधातु, तदेकज्झं अभिसञ्ञूहित्वा अभिसङ्खिपित्वा - अयं वुच्चति "आपोधातु" ।

Vibh p. 103

Therein what is external element of cohesion? That which is external, water, fluid, viscid, viscous, cohesiveness of matter, external not grasped. For example, the juice of roots, juice of stems, juice of bark, juice of leaves, juice of flowers, juice of fruits, milk, soft curd, clarified butter, fresh butter, oil, honey, molasses, waters of the earth or sky; or whatever else there is, external, water, fluid, viscid, viscous, cohesiveness of matter, external not grasped. This is called external element of cohesion.

That which is internal element of cohesion and that which is external element of cohesion; (taking) these together collectively and briefly, that is called the element cohesion. (Tr. P.A. Thiṭṭila)

Similarly, the fluid element is defined in the following way:

कतमं तं रूपं आपोधातु? यं आपो आपोगतं सिनेहो सिनेहगतं बन्धनत्तं रूपस्स अज्झत्तं वा बहिद्धा वा उपादिण्णं वा अनुपादिण्णं वा इदं तं रूपं आपोधातु ।

DhSaṅ p. 226

What is that form which is the fluid element (*āpodhātu*)?

That which is fluid, belonging to fluid, viscid belonging to what is viscid, the cohesiveness of form, whether it be of the self or external, or the issue of grasping or not the issue of grasping. (Tr. Rhys Davids)

In a different context, namely in relation to ethics, the filling of a water-pot drop by drop is compared to the slow but steady accumulation of evil or good deeds:

मावमञ्ञेथ पापस्स, न मन्दं आगमिस्सति ।
उदबिन्दुनिपातेन, उदकुम्भोपि पूरति ।
बालो पूरति पापस्स थोकं थोकम्पि आचिनं ॥
मावमञ्ञेथ पुञ्ञस्स, न मन्दं आगमिस्सति ।

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उदबिन्दुनिपातेन, उदकुम्भोपि पूरति ।
धीरो पूरति पुञ्ञस्स थोकं थोकम्पि आचिनं ॥

DhPad 9.5–6

One should not think lightly of doing evil, imagining "A little will not affect me;" just as a water-jar is filled up by falling of drops (of rain), so also, the fool is filled up with evil, by accumulating it little by little.

One should not think lightly of doing good, imagining "A little will not affect me;" just as a water-jar is filled up by falling drops of rain, so also, the wise one is filled up with merit (*puṇya*) by accumulating it little by little. (Tr. D.M. Tin)

In Jainism, water, like the other three elements, earth, fire and wind, is considered to be a living being (*jīva*).

खिदिजलमरुहवि गयणं णाडीचक्कंमि पंच तत्ताइं ।
एक्कोक्कं चिय घडियं कमेण पवहंति उदयाओ ॥
उड्ढं वहदि य अग्गी अहो जलं तह तिरिच्छओ पवणो ।
मज्झपुडंमि य पुहई णहोवि सव्वंपि पूरंतो ॥

क्षितिजलमरुद् गगनं नाडीचक्रे पञ्चतत्त्वानि ।
एकैकमपि घटिकं क्रमेण प्रवहन्ति उदयात् ॥
ऊर्ध्वं वहति च अग्निः अधो जलं तथा तिर्यक् पवनः ।
मध्यपुटे च पृथ्वी नभोपि सर्वमपि पूरयत् ॥

ṆāSā 53–54

Earth, water, air, fire and space are five elements, which rise every moment in the nerve centres.

Fire goes upwards, Water flows downwards, Wind blows oblique, Earth stands tranquil in the middle and Space is all-pervading. (Tr. Sadananda)

This is said in the context of *prāṇāyāma*, and hence these elements are also internalized in the body. Water is also described as both, gross and subtle. Gross water is called *apkāya*, 'water-body', and 17 forms of water are described, such as: pure water, dew, exudation, fog and ice, etc.

In Jaina cosmology, the universe is represented with a number of oceans and islands.

"The regions from which the soul which is capable of gaining Release will do so are all situated in the middle world. It is arranged around the 'continent

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Figure 35: *Samudras* of the middle country: Jain Cosmology (Gouache on paper, 18th Cent. A.D., Rajasthan)

of the rose-apple tree' (*Jambū-dvīpa*), surrounded by precious, highly-wrought walls and a lotus terace. Surrounding this disk, whose diameter is 100,000 yojanas, are set out horizontally to the farthest sea, which is impossible to reach, an incalculable series of concentric rings, of alternate oceans (*samudras*) and islands or continents (*dvīpas*). Some of these are frequentlz found represented in manuscripts or on temple bas-reliefs, e.g. Kuṇḍala-dvīpa, on both sides of its ring of mountains, and especially Nandīśvara-dvīpa, where the gods go to celebrate the birth of the Tīrthaṃkaras.

The world of men (*Manuṣya-loka*), however, is quite limited, and consists of two and a half continents: besides Jambūdvīpa, it includes the next continent (Dhātakīkhaṇḍa), and the two oceans which border it on either side. It stops at the circular chain of mountains, half-way across the third continent (Puṣkaradvīpa). With its mountains and peaks, its rivers, its lakes and ornamental ponds blooming with lotus-flowers, its woods and trees, its capitals, palaces, temples and sanctuaries of Jainas, strictly laid out and carefully designed, the continent of the Rose-Apple tree serves as a model for the other lands of this Manuṣyaloka, ..." (C. Caillat, *The Jain Cosmology*, pp. 26–27).

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Manifestation in the Arts

Water in its physical, symbolical and ritual aspects is so pervasive in Indian myth and literature, in sculpture, architecture and painting, and indirectly in drama, music and dance, that it is only possible to give examples from these different fields. The central term in Indian aesthetics being *rasa*, 'juice, essence, aesthetic delight', the watery element is no doubt basic for understanding a whole theory of art. In the words of K.D. Tripathi:

> Sensation proper to the sense of taste and related to the element *āpaḥ* (water), almost devoid of noetic representation, has been taken to designate the aesthetic experience or *rasa*. **Nāṭya-Śāstra** of Bharata enunciates the aesthetic concept of *rasa* in the context of *nāṭya*, the highest form of art, which appeals to sight and hearing simultaneously. The senses of sight and hearing only are capable of rising above the boundaries of the limited 'I' according to some thinkers. In drama, sight and hearing both collaborate in rousing in the spectator, more easily and forcibly than the other forms, a unique state of consciousness conceived intuitively as a quintessence, juice or flavour, called *rasa*. The total nature of the aesthetic experience, though supersensuous, includes psychic and sensuous things as its subordinated parts and has its effects felt on the body as well. It is remarkable that the pervasive as well as the quintessential nature of this aesthetic experience is designated by the term *rasa*, which reminds of its cosmic and spiritual connotations in Vedic cosmogony and metaphysics. For the enjoyment aspect of this experience, the terms employed are *āsvāda, rasanā* and *carvaṇā* and they are equally rooted in the sensation proper to the sense of taste related to *āpaḥ* (water). ("From Sensuous to Supersensuous: Some Terms of Indian Aesthetics", in *Prakṛti: The Integral Vision*, Vol.III, p. 71)

In one of his benedictory verses to the chapters of the **Nāṭya-Śāstra**, Abhinavagupta praises the 'watery form' (*jalamūrti*) of the Lord, in which a double sense is implied:

> संसारनाट्यजननधातृबीजलताजुषीम् ।
> जलमूर्तिं शिवां पत्युः सरसां पर्युपास्महे ॥
>
> AbhiBhā on NŚ II.1
>
> We worship the watery Body of the Lord that is full of *rasa*, is Śiva (auspicious) and delights the creeper of the seed of creation involved in the production of the drama of the world. (Tr. P.L. Sharma)

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It is this 'form of water' of the Lord which is at once the basis for the very creativity whether in the creation of the world or in that of drama expressed by the words →*bīja* (Vol. I) and *latā*, seed and creeper, related to the fertile plant world, and for the aesthetic delight denoted by a term derived from the watery element, namely *rasa*. This derivation is clearly expressed by Śārṅgadeva:

> ...जलात् तु रसनं रसम् ॥
> शैत्यं स्नेहं द्रवस्वेदमूत्रादि मृदुतामपि ।
>
> SR I.2.69d–70ab
>
> From the water (it derives) the sense of taste, relish, cooling, viscidity, fluidity, perspiration, urine etc. as well as softness. (Tr. P.L. Sharma)

Nāṭya or drama is connected in many ways with the elements. F.B.J. Kuiper has shown in an interesting study the connection between Varuṇa, god of the waters, and *vidūṣaka*, the comic character in every drama (see Bibliography). To mention only one aspect of this connection, we may mention the first dramatic performance described in the **Nāṭya-Śāstra**, at the end of which the gods, being pleased, present different gifts to the actors. Varuṇa gives a golden pitcher, which Kuiper connects with Vedic cosmology:

> According to Vedic cosmology there was a receptacle (*pātra*) of the cosmic waters under the earth, in which the world tree was rooted. This receptacle was identical with the pail (*kośa*) or amṛta-jar (*kalaśa*), to which the texts often refer and which contained the elixir of the waters. Varuṇa was imagined as residing in the day-time in this nether world, at the bottom of the world tree. The jar is sometimes identified with the earth, of which in a sense it forms part. Indra's demiurgic act of opening the (primordial) hill in order to release the waters meant, therefore, the breaking open of the hill, which was conceived as a jar. It will be shown below that Indra's act was ritually imitated on the stage by breaking an earthenware jar (*kumbha*) in which a small piece of gold had been laid (NŚ 3.72), apparently to indicate that this jar represented the golden pitcher. Since gold is well-known from the Brāhmaṇas as symbolic of life, it seems a reasonable guess that the golden pitcher expresses that its contents consisted of the waters of life. (F.B.J. Kuiper, *Varuṇa and Vidūṣaka*, p. 146)

The **Nāṭya-Śāstra** contains an interesting story narrating the origin of drums (34th Chapter). Once Svāti (one of the *Śivagaṇas*) on a very rainy day

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went to the pond to fetch water. It was raining like cats and dogs. The rainfall was like a stream of water on the pond. There were lotus leaves of big size, of medium size and of small size in that pond. When the rain was falling on the lotus leaves, they were producing different sounds like different kinds of drums. He there heard those sounds very carefully and retained them in the heart. Then he came back and tried to imitate this and with the help of Viśvakarman he prepared the drums.

Here Abhinavagupta has made it clear that *ap* has a great importance in producing sounds. He explained through this story that *ap* is said to be the origin of the *vādya* drums.

> येन जलधरसमयनिपतत्सलिलधारावैचित्र्याभिहन्यमानपुष्करदलविलसित-रचितविचित्रवर्णानुहरणयोजनया यथास्वं वृत्तिनियमेन पुष्करवाद्यनिर्माणं कृतमित्यर्थः ।
>
> AbhiBhā on NŚ I.50, p. 23
>
> In the rainy season when it was raining like a stream of water which falling on the surface of the lotus leaves of the pond produced different sounds, hence the origin of drums came about. (Tr. P.L. Sharma)

We cannot go into greater detail of these connections in the **Nāṭya-Śāstra**.

In temple architecture the cosmic elements are symbolically represented, and water is particularly shown by two symbolic forms: the lotus and the *kumbha* or *kalaśa* (water-pitcher or vase). In the words of Michael Meister:

> The temple also roots itself in water, placing among its wall's base-mouldings (*vedibandha*) a fruiting, flowering, water-pot that represents India's water-oriented cosmogony. This fertile vase (*kalaśa*) acts both as the source and as a ritual lustration for the sacred mountain – which is the temple – acting both as the house for a divinity and as a 'crossing' intended for the transformation of mankind. (Michael Meister, "The Unity and Gravity of an Elemental Architecture", in *Prakṛti: The Integral Vision*, Vol.III, p. 123)

The root of the conception of the temple is again Vedic cosmogony which begins from water, the creative and fertile element. This is shown by the lotus petals surrounding the lower plinth (*pīṭha* or *vedibandha*), giving the impression that the whole structure is supported on a lotus springing from the primordial waters.

In Orissan temple architecture the base or 'foot-part' (*pāda-bhāga*) of the temple consists of five mouldings, which represent the five elements (*pañcakarma*). The first is hoof-shaped (*khura*) and represents the element earth,

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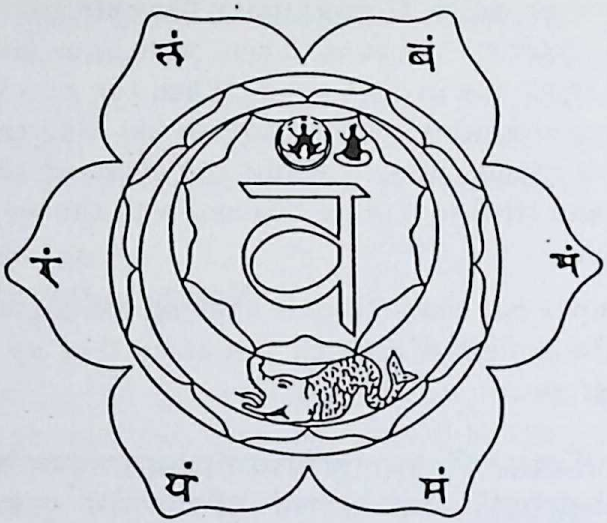

Figure 36: *Svādhiṣṭhāna cakra*: *va-bīja* for water

followed by the *kumbha*, representing water:

खुरस्त्रत्र महाभूमिः क्षिततत्त्वानुरूपतः ।
पञ्चतत्त्वे भवसृष्टिस्तथा शिखरः कल्पितः ॥
तदूर्ध्वे कुम्भभागं च यथोच्चं खुरमेव च ।
आपस्तत्त्वाकृतिः कुम्भः सदा मङ्गलदायकः ॥

ŚiRaKo 84–85

This *khura* is called the great earth, and it represents the element earth (*tattva*).
Just as the world is created from the five elements, so the temple is conceived (from the *pañcakarma*).
Above this (the *khura*) is the *kumbha*, which has the same height as the *khura.*
The *kumbha* represents the element water, and it always bestows auspiciousness. (Tr. B. Bäumer and R.P. Das)

In Orissan terminology, the *kumbha* motif is clearly distinguished from *kalaśa*, and it seems that the first stands for the cosmic and creative waters, whereas the second contains the spiritual nectar, represented on the top of the *śikhara* or spire. The place of the *kalaśa* is not only at the centre above the sanctum (*garbhagṛha*), it also corresponds to the *sahasrāra cakra* of yogic physiology, an inverted lotus whose nectar flows down from the top of the cranium. Thus the creative and the transformative waters, *kumbha* at the bottom and *kalaśa* at the top, complement each other.

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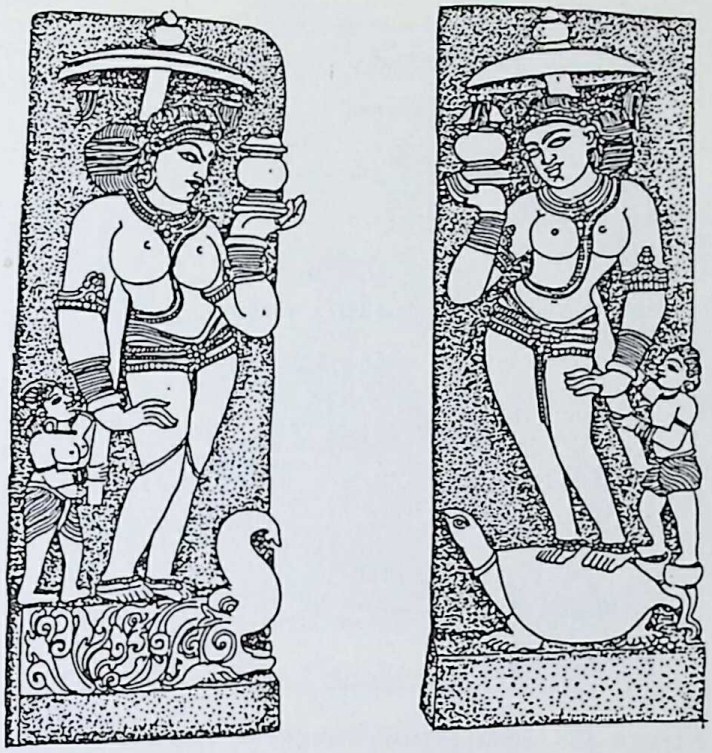

Figure 37: Gaṅgā and Yamunā: Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswar

The *kumbha* motif is pervasive in other parts of the temple, particularly at the bottom and top of pillars and pilasters. Here, too, it indicates the rootedness of the pillar or world-axis in the fertile cosmic waters. Even in secular architecture, the two motifs of lotus and water-pitcher occur at the appropriate places to indicate the relationship of the house as microcosm with the macrocosm.

Iconography is organically placed in the context of the temple, and here again different aspects of the element water are present. Thus the river goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā are placed to the left and right side of the door leading into the sanctum (*garbhagṛha*). This motif can be found from the 5th cent. onwards throughout India, and it has received various interpretations (see Bibliography: Kamrisch, Vogel, Viennot, Stietencron). Iconographically, Gaṅgā can be identified by her *vāhana* (vehicle), the crocodile (*makara*), and Yamunā by the tortoise (*kūrma*). They often hold full pitchers in one hand. Their flanking the entrance to the deity has been explained as representing the necessary purification for the devotee, amounting to a ritual bath and to an initiation. Since water is ritually necessary at every step, their presence at this juncture is quite meaningful (cf. Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* Vol. II, pp. 314–316). Besides, every sacred place where the deity becomes manifest, is considered to be a *tīrtha*, a holy bathing-place, and a place where one 'crosses over' the world-

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Figure 38: Gajalakṣmī: Sanchi Stūpa railing

stream. The goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā stand for any holy river in which the faithful take bath daily in order to obtain purification. In this way the temple, an image of the cosmos, also becomes a microcosm of the sacred geography of Bhāratavarṣa.

A similar symbolism is implied in the placement of the goddess Lakṣmī flanked by two elephants pouring water on her from two full *kumbhas* in the centre of the door lintel. The *gajalakṣmī* motif is a pervasive symbol of the fertility and fullness of the waters. Every element of it points to the fertile waters: the elephants represent the clouds, the two full *kumbhas* contain the waters of life, the rounded breasts of Lakṣmī are filled with life-giving milk, and her whole figure is seated on a lotus emerging from a pond full of lotuses and fishes. Thus various aspects of water are contained in a single image.

The very fact of representing the element water with its fertile, purifying and life-giving nature in the form of a goddess, is connected with the Vedic view of *āpo devīḥ*, and with the later, Tāntric, view of the Śakti. Gaṅgā herself is a divine Śakti, and so is Lakṣmī. It is through the Divine Energy or Śakti that one has access to the Deity.

Another architectural as well as sculptural element of the temple which is related to water, physically, ritually as well as symbolically, is the gargoyle or

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Figure 39: *Ghaṭa Praṇāla*: Indore, 11th Cent. A.D.

water drain (*nāla* or *praṇāla*), through which the sacred water of the sanctum used for ablution of the image of the deity, is discharged outside. Though its function is simple and basically the same as in secular architecture, it has assumed different shapes expressing water symbolism (see Dhaky, Bibliography). The most prominent form is that of a *makara* or sea-monster, which is always associated with the waters.

> जल निष्कास मकरमुखैश्च विकृताननै
>
> AparPṛ, jagatyāṅgasamudāya 115.32
>
> The water chute has the shape of a *makara* face with monstrous mouth.

The water flows out from the mouth of the monster, which is sometimes holding another figure. At the Mahāgāyatrī temple at Konarka, the *makara* is holding a fish in its mouth, thus increasing the watery association. Another type is the *ghaṭa praṇāla* or pot-shaped water-drain, again using the most common symbol for water and fertility. This is often combined with a figure (male or female) holding it and itself representing the water element, as in the case of a *nāga* (Mukhaliṅgam, 8th cent.).

Since water symbolism is pervasive in Indian myths, it has found rich expression in iconography. Some examples may suffice: Before a new creation, Viṣṇu is lying on the world-ocean on the serpent Ananta ('infinity'), and from

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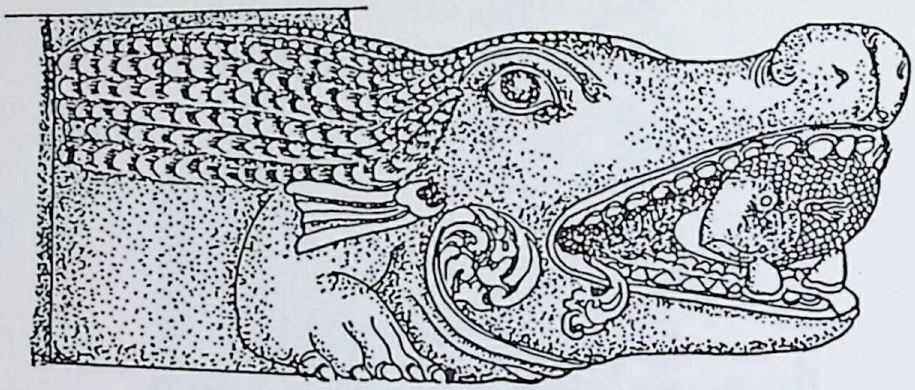

Figure 40: *Makarapraṇāla* with fish: Mahāgāyatri Temple, Konarka

his navel springs the lotus holding Brahmā. This motif has been represented in

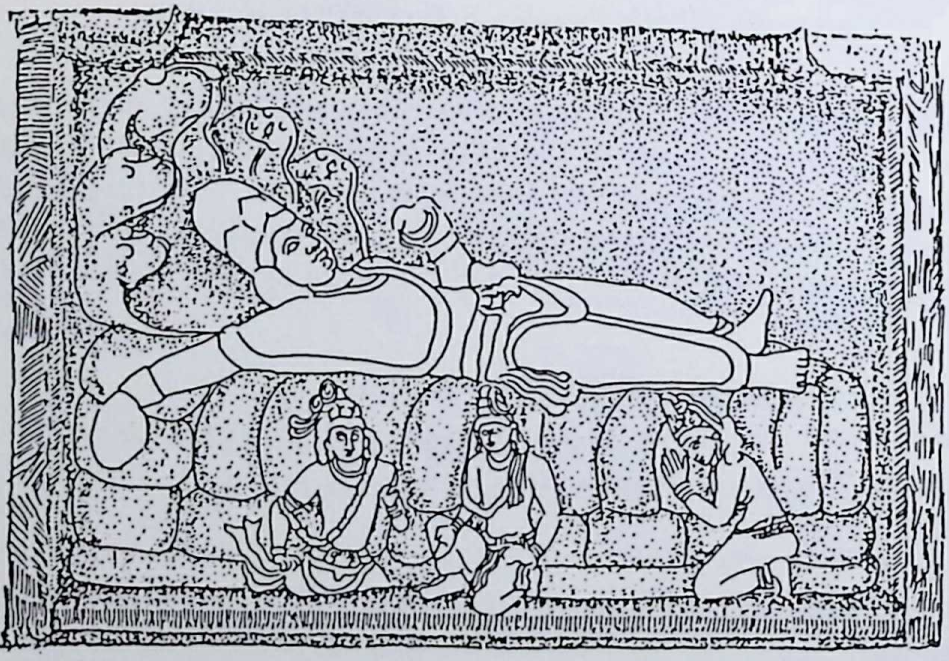

Figure 41: Śeṣaśāyī Viṣṇu: Mahabalipuram

innumerable sculptures and paintings. Sometimes the sculptures themselves are placed in the midst of a water tank (*kuṇḍa*), as in Nepal, symbolising the ocean.

Alice Boner's interpretation of the Viṣṇu on Ādiśeṣa from Ellora (cave 15) is significant: "Viṣṇu's body covers the entire Universe in an attitude of complete relaxation, and in the broad undulating outlines of his limbs suggests the slow

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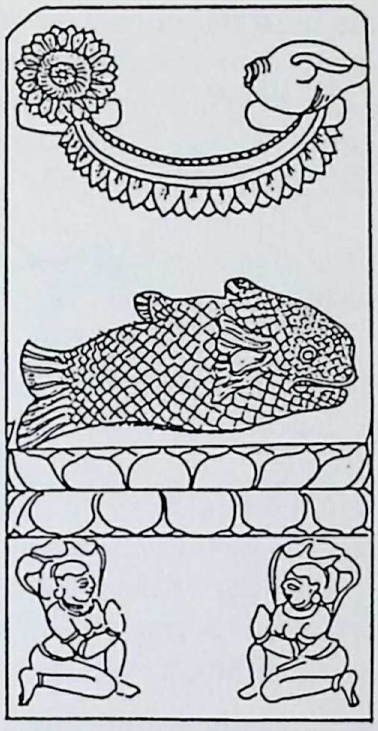

Figure 42: Matsya Avatāra: Baudh, Orissa, ca 9th Cent. A.D.

heaving and falling of deep waters. Viṣṇu and the endless Ocean are one, the sea of all possibilities, the Source of all Life. The movement of the waters is Viṣṇu's breath. Profoundly immersed in his cosmic sleep, he appears unaware of the beginning of a new creation." (Alice Boner, *Principles of Composition*, p. 144).

Several of Viṣṇu's *avatāras* are related to the waters and represented accordingly in sculpture and painting: *Matsya*, the fish *avatāra*, *Kūrma*, the tortoise *avatāra*, and even *Varāha*, the boar, who raises the Earth-goddess or *Bhūdevī* (→*pṛthivī*) from the primordial waters.

The churning of the ocean (*samudramanthana*) is an important myth, which has been often represented in sculpture and painting. Today we could give a relevant ecological interpretation to this myth. In the **Mahābhārata** it is introduced by the following words of Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) to Brahmā:

देवैरसुरसंघैश्च मथ्यतां कलशोदधिः ।
भविष्यत्यमृतं तत्र मथ्यमाने महोदधौ ॥
सर्वौषधीः समावाप्य सर्वरत्नानि चैव हि ।
मन्थध्वमुदधिं देवा वेत्स्यध्वममृतं ततः ॥

MBh I.15.12–13

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> The bucket of the ocean must be churned by both the Gods and the assemblies of the Asuras. Then the Elixir shall spring forth when the Ocean is being churned. Churn ye the Ocean, O Gods, and ye shall find the Elixir, after ye have obtained all good herbs and all precious stones. (Tr. J.A.B. van Buitenen)

Mount Mandara served as the churning stick and the serpent Ananta as the rope. "Then the Gods marched with the mountain to the ocean, and they said to him: 'For the sake of the Elixir we shall churn your water'." All the gods and *asuras* were churning it and many precious substances and divine beings arose out of this churning. Before they could get the Elixir of immortality (*amṛta*), the great poison *halāhala* was produced. In order to save the world from being poisoned, Śiva himself swallowed the poison, and his neck became blue (Nīlakaṇṭha). In the end the *amṛta* was won and was given in the custody of the gods. Without going into detail of this fascinating ecological myth, we may only consider the different transformations of the element water, ranging from the milk ocean to poison and finally nectar.

Another important myth is the descent of Gaṅgā which has found a magnificent representation in the rock relief of Mamallapuram. In the words of Kapila Vatsyayan:

> Surpassing in stature, beauty and ecological significance is the monumental dramatic relief of all time in Mamallapuram. It represents the celebrated myth of descent of the Gaṅgā in a manner which leaves an indelible impression. On a huge wall of rock rising vertically towards the clear blue skies of South India, a cosmic tableaux in relief is enacted on a space of twenty-seven meters length, nine in height. It is teaming with host of serpents, plants, animals, men, women, *Apsaras* and *Gandharvas*, all converging towards a natural cleft in the middle of the composition. The decisive moment of the effectiveness of Bhagīratha's *tapas* no doubt dramatically captured, but what is more, the series of events or ecological phases are all depicted in one setting. The celestial stream rushed down metaphorically through a cistern above the great rock. Today we imagine this stream. A giant serpent king (*Nāgarāja*) is covered by the torrent, moves upward in undulating movements, i.e., all aquatic life rejoices at her descent. To the right of the saint are large aquatic birds, large geese. All manner of life flocks together – reptiles, animals, birds, gods and goddesses. Here are elephants, families of perching monkeys, deers, lions, *Apsaras* and *Gandharvas* – all watch the miracle. In a superb animated sculptural style, this is the true celebration

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Figure 43: Nāgarāja with *praṇala*: Mukhaliṅgam, A.P.

and consecration of life, asserting, reaffirming the basic kinship of all living creature. All is sustained by one life source, one life giving energy; this is the universal eternal play of matter and energy. The waters of the dried *Sāgara* descend from heaven to purify all. (Kapila Vatsyayan, "Ecology and Indian Myth", in *Prakṛti: The Integral Vision*, Vol.III, p. 147)

Leaving aside innumerable myths and mythical beings such as *Yakṣas* and *Nāgas* and their visual representations, we may consider some abstract symbolical principles underlying both, ritual *yantras* and sculpture. Since water and fire, *ap* and *agni*, are opposite as well as complementary elements, they are geometrically represented by the horizontal and vertical lines, also called *abrekhā* (water line) and *agnirekhā* (fire line).

उत्थितरेखा अग्निरूपाः पार्श्वगा अब्रूपाः तिर्यग्रेखा मरुद्रूपा इति ।

VSUp II.21

Vertical lines have the nature of fire, horizontal lines have the nature of water, diagonal lines have the nature of wind (*māruta*). (Tr. A. Boner – B. Bäumer)

The same text says that figures predominately on the horizontal line produce

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a feeling of fluidity (VSUp II.24, Comm.). On the other hand, the two elements are represented by two triangles: the upright triangle stands for fire, and the triangle with its apex downward indicates water:

निम्नगास्त्रिहुता आप इति ।

VSUp II.16

The inverted triangle is water. (Tr. A. Boner – B. Bäumer)

The integration of the two forms in a hexagram (*ṣaṭkoṇa*) symbolises the union of fire and water, of the male and the female, and of all pairs of opposites. Therefore the hexagram forms the central part of many Tāntric *yantras/maṇḍalas*.

In sacred or secular *architecture*, including village and town planning, the placement of any settlement or temple has to be near water – possibly a river, a lake or a man-made tank. Thus the **Bṛhat Saṃhitā** prescribes the placement of temples near water, because the gods rejoice in the vicinity of waters:

कृत्वा प्रभूतं सलिलमारामान् विनिवेश्य च ।
देवतायतनं कुर्याद्यशोधर्माभिवृद्धये ॥

* * *

सलिलोद्यानयुक्तेषु कृतेष्वकृतकेषु च ।
स्थानेष्वेतेषु सान्निध्यमुपगच्छन्ति देवताः ॥

* * *

क्रौञ्चकाञ्चीकलापाश्च कलहंसकलस्वराः ।
नद्यस्तोयांशुका यत्र शफरीकृतमेखलाः ॥

* * *

वनोपान्तनदीशैलनिर्झरोपान्तभूमिषु ।
रमन्ते देवता नित्यं पुरेषूद्यानवत्सु च ॥

BṛSam LVI.1, 3, 6, 8

1. One should build a temple in order to enhance one's fame and *dharma*, after securing an abundant supply of water through tanks and lakes, laying out fine gardens.

3. Deities reside with pleasure in places which abound in water and gardens, whether natural or otherwise.

6. Likewise do they dwell in places where the rivers have large girdles of curlews, sweet voice in the form of the melodious notes of the royal swans...

8. They rejoice always in the vicinity of forests, rivers, mountains and waterfalls, as well as in towns abounding in pleasure-gardens. (Tr. M. R. Bhat)

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The **Mayamata** gives the instruction that a water course bordering a temple or house should be moving to the right (*pradakṣiṇodakavatī varṇagandharasaiḥ śubhā*, Mayam III.6).

In the **Artha-Śāstra** the location of a town or district headquarters is described as follows:

> जनपदमध्ये समुदयस्थानं स्थानीयं निवेशयेत् । वास्तुकप्रशस्ते देशे नदीसङ्गमे ह्रदस्य वा अविशोषस्याङ्के सरसस्तटाकस्य वा ।वृत्तं दीर्घं चतुरस्रं वा वास्तुकवशेन प्रदक्षिणोदकं पण्यपुटभेदनमंसवारिपथाभ्यामुपेतम् ।
>
> ArthŚ II.3.3
>
> In the centre of the country, he should lay out a *sthānīya*, the headquarters for revenue, on a site recommended by experts in the science of building, at the confluence of rivers or on the bank of a lake that never dries up, either a (natural) lake or a (man-made) tank, round, rectangular or square or in accordance with the nature of the building site, with water flowing from left to right, a market town, served by a land-route and a water-route. (Tr. R.P. Kangle)

The *rituals* accompanying the construction of a house or temple are associated with water, from the laying out of the *Vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala* to the final consecration:

> अथ हर्म्ये परिनिष्ठिते तदा यजमानोऽपि गुरुश्च वर्धकिः ।
> उदगायनशोभनर्क्षपक्षे जलसम्प्रोक्षण कर्म चारभेत् ॥
>
> Mayam XVIII.165
>
> Once the building is finished, the donor, as well as the master and the *vardhakī* must perform the rite of consecration by water and they must do so during the (auspicious) fortnight of a favourable lunar month in the period when the sun's path is to the north. (Tr. B. Dagens)

The Vāstu-Śāstras also contain detailed descriptions about the digging of wells and the construction of water tanks and large reservoirs.

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Figure 44: Gaṅgā on Makara with Gaṇa: Besnagar, 500 A.D.

Process

The dynamic nature of water can be seen in processes at several levels:

1. In cosmogony, the waters play an important role, as we have seen (see the Vedic texts quoted above).

2. In nature the water-cycle is most important and life-giving, and it has given rise to innumerable myths and metaphors. The process leads from the rain-cloud, to rain, springs, rivers and lakes to the ocean.

जलमेकविधं सर्वं पतत्यैन्द्रं नभस्तलात् ।
तत् पतत् पतितं चैव देशकालावपेक्षते ॥
खात पतत् सोमवाय्वर्कैः स्पृष्टं कालानुवर्तिभिः ।
शीतोष्णस्निग्धरूक्षाद्यैर्यथासन्नं महीगुणैः ॥

CarSam SūSthā XXVII.196–197

Entire water is only one which falls down as rain from the sky. That while falling or having fallen down depends on place and time.

Water, while falling down from the sky, and coming in contact with the moon, the air and sun, which follow time, gets impregnated with

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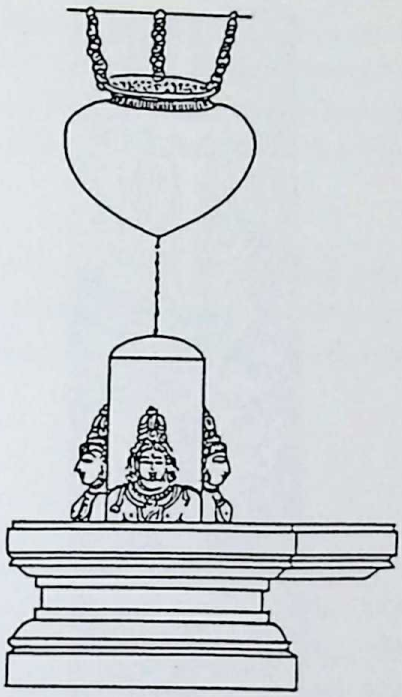

Figure 45: *Śivaliṅga* with *Dhārāpātra*: symbolzing the union of fire (*liṅga*) and water

> the properties of cold, hot, unctuous etc. and so when it rests on the ground. (Tr. P.V. Sharma)

The cyclical nature of life is largely influenced by the cyclical process of water in its different transformations.

3. The cosmic functions of water are channalized and symbolically applied in *ritual*. Here the water geography itself becomes a sacred geography, where pilgrimage to and bathing in springs (e.g. the sources of river Gaṅgā), rivers (such as Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Kāverī) and confluences (*saṅgama, prayāga*), tanks (e.g. Kurukṣetra), sacred lakes (e.g. Puṣkar) and finally in the sea (e.g. at Gaṅgāsāgar, Puri) is a ritual re-enactment of the cosmic process and at the same time a purification (from sin, sickness and death).

In personal and temple ritual the following processes are involved (in a simplified form): bath as purification (*snāna*), sipping of water (*ācamana*), offering of water to the deity, to a symbol or sacred object (such as Liṅga or a tree), or to the sun (*arghya*), sprinkling of water in a rite of consecration (*abhiṣeka*), drinking of sacred water, and, finally, returning the ritual implements, offerings or even the temporary image to the waters of a river, a tank or the sea in an act of dissolution (*visarjana*). Thus water is ritually important at all the three

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Figure 46: *Pūrṇakumbha*

phases of the creative process: creation, maintenance and dissolution (→*sṛṣṭi, sthiti, saṃhāra*, Vol. IV).

Another important element in every ritual, whether *yajña* or *pūjā*, is the consecration of a water jar (*kalaśa*) at the beginning, which consists in invoking the presence of the gods and of the sacred rivers in the water:

कलसानां मुखे ब्रह्मा ग्रीवायां शङ्करः स्थितः ।
मूले तु संस्थितो विष्णुर्मध्ये मातृगणाः स्थिताः ॥
दिक्पाला देवताः सर्वे वेष्टयन्ति दिशो दश ।
कुक्षौ तु सागराः सप्त सप्तद्वीपाश्च संस्थिताः ॥
नक्षत्राणि ग्रहाः सर्वे तथैव कुलपर्वताः ।
गङ्गाद्याः सरितः सर्वा वेदाश्चत्वार एव च ॥
कलसे संस्थिताः सर्वे तेषु तानि विचिन्तयेत् ।

KāPur, Puṣyābhiṣeka 87

At the mouth of the *kalaśa* is Brahmā, at its neck is placed Śiva and

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at its base Viṣṇu is installed. In the centre are the host of Mothers. The guardians of the directions surround it in all the ten quarters. In its womb are contained the seven oceans and the seven islands. All the constellations and planets, the mountains, all the rivers such as Gaṅgā and the four Vedas are installed in the *kalasa*. Thus it should be meditated upon.

Just as in this ritual process the divine and cosmic elements are made present, the symbol of the *kalaśa* found in numerous art-forms contains them in its womb. In this way the cosmic, creative and purifying waters are re-presented and brought to life.

Conclusion

Though every element of the five *mahābhūtas* has its important place in Indian cosmology, myth, ritual and art, water (*ap, udaka, jala* etc.) seems to fulfil a privileged role. It has produced the richest symbolism in literature as well as visual representation, and in its various natural forms such as rivers and sea it has determined the life and culture of India in a unique way. An entire sacred geography with its connected rituals and pilgrimages is based on water, and has inspired the imagination of poets, saints and artists for centuries. Every important cultural and religious centre is situated on the banks of a river or of the sea, combining practical utility with symbolic significance. Lakes and tanks such as Puṣkar and Kurukṣetra still retain their connections with cosmogony which is periodically re-enacted at certain auspicious times by a bath in the life-renewing waters. Moreover, the central place given to purity (*śuddhi, śauca*) and purification in Indian life at every stage enhances further the importance of sacred water.

Since water has been seen in its pure and purifying aspect, the idea of pollution has hardly found a place in ancient literature, though certain myths can be interpreted in the light of modern ecology. But we find an ecological awareness in the Vedas, where water is said to heal whatever has been injured in the earth:

अथाप उपनिनयति । यत्र वा अस्यै खनन्तः क्रूरीकुर्वन्ति अपघ्नन्ति । शान्तिरापः तदद्भिः शान्त्या शमयति । तदद्भिः सन्दधाति । तस्मादप उपनिनयति ॥

ŚBr III.6.1.19

He (the Adhvaru) then pours water thereon; – wherever, in digging,

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they would injure this (earth) – water being a means of soothing – there he soothes it by that means of soothing water, there he heals it by water: therefore he pours water thereon. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

यद्वा अस्यै क्षतम् यद्विलिष्टम् – अद्भिर्वै तत् सन्धीयते ।

ŚBr VI.4.3.1

For whatever is injured or torn in this earth that is healed by water. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

No doubt, a rediscovery of the entire range of meaning of this element in the Indian tradition could contribute to a greater ecological awareness in relation to the purity of rivers, lakes and sea and to the technological manipulation of water regardless of its cultural significance.

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PṚTHIVĪ/BHŪMI

Overview

Pṛthivī or *bhūmi* (both f.) means the earth, the wide world, the broad and extended one, ground, site, region, soil, clay, the cosmic element (*mahābhūta*) of solidity. It is referred to as 'this here' (*idam*) as against anything beyond. It is the ecosphere familiar to all human beings and the solid ground on which human activities flourish. It is the habitat of all living beings (*bhūtadhātrī*) and it also supplies them with their food and water and other necessities of life. Thus the earth is indeed the earth-mother. Early in the **Ṛgveda** *pṛthivī* is coupled with the word *dyaus*, i.e. the sky/heaven to form the dual term *dyāvāpṛthivī* – the father and mother, respectively, of all.

Bhūmi, the solid ground, provides the firm base for all structures, whether natural like mountains etc., or man-made constructions like houses, and palaces, sacrificial enclosures, pavilions and temples. The importance of this last group enhances the importance of the earth's purity and its status as the supreme locus of all beings on the earth. Hence in the **Atharva-Veda** the earth is praised as the most solidly rooted basis. Indeed, it is the ground (*bhūmi*) which is the locus of all. Through its own steadiness the earth keeps everything steady and firmly supported. The earth is grounded on cosmic truth, and that ensures the durability of all human endeavours which are grounded on the same principle through the earth. Sacrifices are made on this earth and hence their effects are durable and sure to achieve their ends. Thus the earth is the sacred ground, the locus of the gods and other beings. It adds mystic power (*ṛta*) to all sacrificial ingredients made of earth or clay, like the bricks for the altars, the stove for cooking sacrificial offerings, and the pots in which these are cooked. The concept of *bhūmi* as the location where beings originate is also found in the Buddhist canon (cf. *kāmāvacarabhūmi, rūpāvacarabhūmi* and *lokottarabhūmi* in ViMag IV.9.3). *Bhūmi* in this sense is almost synonymous to *bhuvana* or →*loka* (Vol. II).

In the Indian systems of meditation, both in Buddhism and in Hinduism, *bhūmi* is used to denote stages or spiritual levels of experiences.

The firmness of the earth finds further expression in cosmology. Of the three, four, or five cosmic elements (*mahābhūta* or *bhūta*), the basic constituents of the physical world, the earth is the last. It is the solid element, *bhū*. Although ontologically *pṛthivī* is one of the three, four, or five elements, namely the element

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of solidity, cosmologically it was created last of all. Therefore, even though its defining characteristic is the quality of smell, it possesses the defining qualities of all the other elements also, viz. touch, colour and taste. However, there seems to be a difference of opinion as to whether the earth element possessess sound, the defining quality of the element of space. This may be because the earlier view on the number of elements was three (cf. ChUp VI.2.1–4).

Etymology and Related Words

As explained by Yāska, (Nir I.14) the word *pṛthivī* is derived from the root *prath–* meaning to expand or extend and directly refers to the vastness of the earth. It is the feminine form of the noun *pṛthu* which means vast, broad, expansive, etc. *Pṛthivī* is a variant of the original feminine form *pṛthvī*. An interesting passage in the **Mīmāṃsā Bhāṣya** discusses whether the verb derived from the root *prath–* is used in the transitive sense. If so, the expansion of the earth must have been caused by some agent. But, although in the **Ṛgveda** Indra is sometimes described as expanding the earth, such references are not always consistent.

Because of the phonetic similarity, *pṛthivī*, the earth, came to be connected with the mythological King Pṛthu who harnessed the wild but fertile earth to yield to agriculture.

The lexicons supply many synonyms for the term *pṛthivī* or *bhū/bhūmi*. The **Nighaṇṭu** (I.1.) gives twenty terms for *pṛthivī* of which *gau, kṣmā, kṣoṇi, kṣiti, bhū, bhūmi, pṛthivī, mahī, aditi*, etc. are among the most important (cf. YV XIII.18, where the earth is addressed as *aditi* and also called *bhū* and *bhūmi*, meaning the boundless earth and the ground respectively). In the classical period, lexicons of synonyms like the **Rājanirghaṇṭa**, the **Śabdaratnāvalī**, and the **Jaṭādhara** contain some eighty terms signifying the earth. Terms like *dharaṇī, dharā*, etc. signify that the earth contains and supports everything. *Mahī* refers to its vastness and *vasundharā* refers to the earth as the repository of all wealth. But *pṛthivī/bhū/bhūmi* also mean land/country/location (cf. KaṭhUp I.24, where the earth is called *mahābhūmi*), the place inhabited by living beings, especially by those who are subjected to the law of *karma*.

The **Amara Kośa** (II.2.1) records thirty-eight synonyms for the earth (*bhū*), viz. *bhūḥ, bhūmiḥ, acalā, anantā, rasā, viśvambharā, sthirā, dharā, dharitrī, dharaṇī, kṣoṇī, jyā, kāśyapī, kṣitiḥ, sarvaṃsahā, vasumatī, vasudhā, ūrvī, vasundharā, gotrā, kuḥ, pṛthivī, pṛthvī, kṣmā, avaniḥ, medinī, mahī, vipulā, gahvarī, dhātrī, gauḥ, ilā, kumbhinī, kṣamā, bhūtadhātrī, ratnagarbhā, jagatī, sāgarāmbarā*.

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To these synonyms one may add those found in some early Buddhist texts. Thus, Buddhaghosa in the **Visuddhimagga** (IV.29) explaining the method of meditation on the earth – *kasiṇa* – as a support, gives several synonyms for the name earth to be used by the meditator: *pathavī, mahī* (the great one), *medinī* (the friendly one), *bhūmi* (the ground), *vasudhā* (the provider of wealth), and *vasundharā* (the bearer of wealth) etc. (tr. Bhikkhu Ñyāṇamoli). The novice meditator is to choose whichever name suits his perception of the earth and concentrate on it. In the **Majjhima Nikāya** (PTS edition, Vol. 127) the mind's *metta* is compared to the vastness of the great earth, *mahī*, which is deep and immeasurable.

Just as *pṛthivī* etymologically signifies that which is vast or wide (as does *ūrvī*), *bhū* etymologically signifies the place of being, that is, space (ŚBr VI.1.1.15). But *bhū* and its cognates tend, more than *pṛthivī*, to indicate ground, clay, soil and site. But notwithstanding this slight difference in usage, both can be used as perfect synonyms.

Layers of Meaning

The **Artha-Śāstra** defines *pṛthivī* as follows:

> देशः पृथिवी । तस्यां हिमवत्समुद्रान्तरम् उदीचीनं योजनसहस्रपरिमाणं तिर्यक्चक्रवर्तिक्षेत्रम् । तत्रारण्यो ग्राम्यः पार्वत औदको भौमः समो विषम इति विशेषाः । ArthŚ IX.1.17–19
>
> Country (space) means the earth; in it the thousands *yojanas* of the northern portion of the country that stretched between the Himalayas and the Ocean form the dominion of no significant emperor; in it, there are such varieties of land as forests, villages, mountains, watery, earthly, level plains, and uneven ground.
> (Tr. R. Shamasastry)

Clearly here *pṛthivī* means territory. In this sense it has given rise to the word *pārthiva*, the common term to denote a king as '(a lord) of the earth'. This is cognate to such words as *pṛthivī/pṛthvī-pāla* (sustainer of the earth) and *pṛthivī-pati* (lord of the earth).

The earth as the bearer of life was regarded as the mother of all beings. It is also one of the three domains (*lokāḥ*) where all phenomena are manifest and, as such are the dwelling place of all things (cf. ṚV I.22.15). They are the terrestrial dwelling, the atmospheric dwelling and the celestial dwelling (which are named and evoked as *bhūr, bhuvar*, and *svar*). Amarasiṃha on the authority

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of Kṣīrasvāmin, derives the word *bhūr*, as follows: "all originates (*bhavati*) from this hence, it is called *bhūḥ*, i.e. the source. It has also a form in which it has an *r*– ending as in (the *vyāhṛtis*) *bhūrbhuvaḥ svaḥ*, i.e. the names of the three *lokāḥ*" (AmKo II.1.3). Next, quoting the same authority, he presents the derivation of the word *pṛthivī*. Following Yāska, he first derives the word from the root *prath*–, meaning expanding, broadening etc. But then he gives another derivation from the root *prath*– to descend, and explains that the earth was brought down from heaven by the mythical king Pṛthu and so is regarded as Pṛthivī, the daughter of Pṛthu. This famous myth about king Pṛthu and his taming of the Earth-cow is often depicted in paintings and in plastic art.

Amarasiṃha, in his collection of synonyms, classified under the heading of the *bhūmi-varga* (words falling within the class earth), such words as *mṛt, mṛttikā*, words denoting soil, ground and *sthala, sthalī*, site, *loka*, world and country (such as Bhāratavarṣa), and →*deśa* (Vol. II), land (e.g. *puṇyabhūmi* Āryāvarta), types of ground such as marshy land (*anūpa, kaccha* etc.), also land of a particular situation, like the border-land (*paryanta-bhūmi*), and also all words meaning way or path, etc. thus *bhūmi*, land, more than its synonym *pṛthivī*, the earth, includes in its connotation objects pertaining to the ground, soil and the like.

Development of the Concept

The importance of this abode-of-all, *dharaṇī*, to the life of mankind is easy to understand, and it was expressed in various hymns as well as exegetical and speculative passages of Vedic literature. The earliest use of the terms *bhū/pṛthivī* is found in the **Ṛgveda**. Besides dedicating a small hymn (V.84) of three stanzas exclusively to *pṛthivī*, the **Ṛgveda** mentions it in compounds like *dyāvāpṛthivī, rodasī, kṣoṇī* and the like in conjunction with heaven or the sky (*dyuḥ, dyaus*) with reference to them as cosmic parents.

ऋतं दिवे तदवोचं पृथिव्या अभिश्रावाय प्रथमं सुमेधाः ।
पातामवद्याद् दुरितादभीके पिता माता च रक्षतामवोभिः ॥
इदं द्यावापृथिवी सत्यमस्तु पितर्मातर्यदिहोपब्रुवे वाम् ।
भूतं देवानामवमे अवोभिर्विद्यामेषं वृजनं जीरदानुम् ॥

ṚV 1.185.10–11

I have in my wisdom spoken this truth to heaven and earth, so that they will hear it first. Let them protect us from the blame and evil that we face. Let father and mother guard us with helping favours.

Let this come true, what I have said here in prayer to you, sky and earth, father and mother. Become the closest to the gods with

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your helping favours. Let us find the drink whose luscious drops give strength and ecstasy. (Tr. W. Doniger O'Flaherty)

Sometimes they are spoken of as two halves (II.27.15) and are compared to two great bowls turned towards each other (III.55.20). This refers to one strand of Vedic cosmology according to which a golden cosmic egg was halved and the earth is one half of it while the sky is the other (cf. ŚBr VI.1.1.11 and ChUp III.15.1). Again, the **Ṛgveda** describes the sky and the earth as being shaped like two wheels joined by an axle and that they thus resemble the greatness of Indra (cf. ṚV X.89.4). Later texts also specify that they are two halves of an egg.

... तैजसेऽभवद्धैमे ।
स्वर्भूशकले ... ॥

BṛSam I.6

... from that (water) sprang a fiery golden egg consisting of the two parts of the shell, viz. heaven and earth... (Tr. M.R. Bhat)

Even when *dyau* is not mentioned the earth is spoken of as the kindly mother to whom the dead man will go after his funeral (ṚV X.18.10).

Heaven, atmosphere and earth frequently form a triad in the **Ṛgveda** corresponding to the above-mentioned three realms (→*loka*, Vol. II). Sometimes the **Ṛgveda** only uses the word *pṛthivī* in the plural to indicate the three realms. Indra upheld the earth and spread it out (*paprathat*, ṚV II.15.1). Viṣṇu measured it and then secured the abode on high. This conception gave rise to the myth of Viṣṇu's three steps (→ *krama*, Vol. II).

विष्णोर्नु कं वीर्याणि प्र वोचं यः पार्थिवानि विममे रजांसि ।
यो अस्कभायदुत्तरं सधस्थं विचक्रमाणस्त्रेधोरुगायः ॥

ṚV I.154.1

Let me now sing the heroic deeds of Viṣṇu, who has measured apart the realms of earth, who propped up the upper dwelling-place, striding far as he stepped forth three times. (Tr. W. Doniger O'Flaherty)

Pṛthivī, the earth, is the source of food and shelter. She is the fertile field which is impregnated by rainwater. Sometimes heaven fertilizes the earth by the descent of moisture and light and then both nourish living beings in the form of rain and vegetation. She is luminous (*ārjuni*), and she scatters the rain on the ground to increase the harvest of grain. Alternatively the rain cloud fecundates her.

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प्र वाता वान्ति पतयन्ति विद्युत उदोषधीर्जिहते पिन्वते स्वः ।
इरा विश्वस्मै भुवनाय जायते यत्पर्जन्यः पृथिवीं रेतसावति ॥

ṚV V.83.4

The winds blow strong, the lightnings flash, the plants spring up, the firmament dissolves; earth becomes (fit) for all creatures when Parjanya fertilizes the soil with showers. (Tr. H.H. Wilson)

A very important aspect of the way in which the earth is conceived in the Vedas is as a firm support. She not only supports all created beings but also upholds all the ritual activities of man. As *dharā*, the locus, the earth bears all, and her own stability is beyond any doubt. Indra fixes her to strengthen the foundation of the heavenly region.

वि भूम्या अप्रथय इन्द्र सानु दिवो रज उपरमस्तभायः ॥

ṚV I.62.5cd

Thou Indra, hast spread out the earth's high ridges, and firmly fixed the region under heaven. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

As *kṣmā*, she supports the mountains and trees of the forests; she is great (*mahī*), firm (*dṛḍhā*), (ṚV V.84.3), and Viṣṇu has fixed her with pegs (ṚV VII.99.3) while Bṛhaspati supports her ends (ṚV IV.50.1). In the **Ṛgveda** X.90, Puruṣa, the cosmic giant, created the world out of his body and his feet became the earth.

Moreover the earth is firmly grounded on truth.

सत्येनोत्तभिता भूमिः सूर्येणोत्तभिता द्यौः ।
ऋतेनादित्यास्तिष्ठन्ति दिवि सोमो अधि श्रितः ॥

ṚV X.85.1

The earth is propped up by truth, the sky is propped up by the sun. Through the Law the Ādityas stand firm and Soma is placed in the sky. (Tr. W. Doniger O'Flaherty)

The idea that the earth's foundation is Truth and Cosmic Order (*ṛta*) is more clearly expressed in the famous hymn to the Earth in the **Atharva-Veda** (XII.1.1).

सत्यं बृहत् ऋतमुग्रं दीक्षा तपो ब्रह्म यज्ञः पृथिवीं धारयन्ति ।

AV XII.1.1ab

Great Truth, formidable right, consecration, penance, brahman, sacrifice sustain the earth. (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

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Thus *satya*, truth, *ṛta*, cosmic order, *dīkṣā*, initiation, *tapas*, penance, *brahman*, and sacrifice sustain the earth. Therefore, the earth who is the mistress of what is and what is to be, can expand to contain all created beings. This important attribute of the earth enhances the sacrificer's trust in her to support him and his ritual activities. The **Atharva-Veda** says:

यस्यां वेदिं परिगृह्णन्ति भूम्यां यस्यां यज्ञं तन्वते विश्वकर्माणः ।
यस्यां मीयन्ते स्वरवः पृथिव्यामूर्ध्वाः शुक्रा आहुत्याः पुरस्तात् ।
सा नो भूमिर्वर्धयद् वर्धमाना ॥

AV XII.1.13

Earth on whose surface they enclose the altar, and all performers spin the thread of worship; in whom the stakes of sacrifice, resplendant, are fixed and raised on high before the oblation, may she, this earth, prospering, make us prosper. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

In the **Ṛgveda** (X.72.6) it is stated that Brahmaṇaspati forged together the world from nothing, like a smith. The existent came out of the nonexistent and thence in succession came forth the earth, space, Aditi and Dakṣa. The gods were borne by Aditi who brought forward the sun. This description was further developed in the hymn (X.190) which states that from heat (*tapas*) was generated order (*ṛta*), whence arose the night, the ocean, the year, and the creator (*dhātā*) who produced, in succession, sun, moon, heaven and earth (cf. also ṚV X.121.1). The earth is referred to as the first created phenomenon by the **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** (XIV.1.2.10–11):

इयं वै पृथिवी भूतस्य प्रथमजा । तदनयैवैनमेतत् समर्द्धयति । कृत्स्नं करोति ।

* * *

...इयती ह वा इयमग्रे पृथिव्यास प्रादेशमात्री । ताम् एमूष इति वराह उज्जघान । सोऽस्याः पतिः प्रजापतिः । तेनैवैनमेतन् मिथुनेन प्रियेण धाम्ना समर्द्धयति । कृत्स्नं करोति ।

ŚBr XIV.1.2.10–11

The firstborn of the world, doubtless, is this earth: it thus is therewith that he (Adhvaryu) supplies and completes it. [Prajāpati/sacrificer]...

Indeed, only so large was this earth in the beginning, of the size of a span. A boar, called Emūṣa, raised her up, and he was her lord Prajāpati: with that mate, his heart's delight, he (Adhvaryu) thus supplies and completes him. (Tr. J. Eggeling)

The **Taittirīya Saṃhitā** (VII.1.5.1) records the same myth of the earth's birth as follows:

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Figure 47: Varāha with Bhūdevī: Eran, M.P., 5th Cent. A.D.

आपो वा इदमग्रे सलिलम् आसीत् तस्मिन् प्रजापतिर्वायुर्भूत्वाऽचरत् स इमामपश्यत् तां वराहो भूत्वाऽहरत् तां विश्वकर्मा भूत्वा व्यमार्ट् साऽप्रथत सा पृथिव्यभवत् तत् पृथिव्यै पृथिवित्वम् ... ।

TSam VII.1.5.1

This was in the beginning the waters, the ocean. In it Prajāpati becoming the wind, moved. He saw her and becoming a boar he seized her. Her, becoming Viśvakarmā He wiped. She extended, she became the earth and hence the earth is called the earth (lit. extended). (Tr. A.B. Keith)

There is a beautiful hymn to the earth in the **Atharva-Veda** (XII.1) (see Bruce's "Vedic Conception of the Earth", JRAS, 1862, 321ff). Like the **Ṛgveda** it also gives a picture of the earth very much as a natural phenomenon. It further adds that the earth is where the people of old spread themselves, and the gods overcame the *asuras* (XII.1.5). But it is also where people live and offer sacrifice to the gods. Here for the first time a connection is made with the earth and its special quality, i.e. the odour.

यस्ते गन्धः पृथिवि सम्बभूव यं बिभ्रत्योषधयो यमापः ।
यं गन्धर्वा अप्सरसश्च भेजिरे तेन मा सुरभिं कृणु मा नो द्विक्षत कश्चन ॥

AV XII.1.23

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Scent that hath risen from thee, O earth, the fragrance which growing herbs and plants and waters carry, shared by Apsarasas, shared by Gandharvas, therewith make thou me sweet; let no man hate me. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

This could be the source for the later ascription to the element of earth (solidity) of the essential quality of smell (*gandha*).

Also in this hymn the earth is said to be full of hidden treasures and to possess gold in her heart. Earth also bears fire. She is, declares the poet, his mother. He prays to her to be milked by all people which may be the origin of the earth's personification as a cow in the myth of Pṛthu. In fact, this hymn often compares the earth to a cow. She is also identified with Aditi, the source of light and deliverer from sin.

An anthropomorphic conception of the form of the earth does not seem to have been developed in the Vedas. The **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa** calls it circular (*parimaṇḍala*). The early Vedic description of the earth is naturalistic; she is full of hills, mountains, slopes, rivers, seas and oceans.

शिला भूमिरश्मा पांसुः सा भूमिः संधृता धृता ।
तस्यै हिरण्यवक्षसे पृथिव्या अकरं नमः ।

AV XII.1.26

Rock [is] earth (*bhūmi*), stone, dust; this earth (*bhūmi*) [is] held together, held; to that earth, gold-backed (*-vakṣase*) have I paid homage. (Tr. W.D. Whitney)

Also the **Ṛgveda** (I.35.8) says that the earth (*pṛthivī*) has eight points (*kakubha*) of the horizon.

The **Yajur-Veda** (XIII.18) understands the term *bhūmi* to mean ground. *Bhū* means the earth as a whole, and *bhuvana* indicates the world. The **Yajur-Veda** (I.17), takes even the word *pṛthivī* to mean earth/clay, the material for making pots and the like. Also the **Taittirīya Saṃhitā** (I.1.2) takes *pṛthivī* to mean the ground, where sacrifices to the gods are performed. The **Śāṅkhāyana Brāhmaṇa** (I.9.3.11), clearly equates the earth with the clay/soil which makes the bricks for the construction of an altar. In Vedic literature the earth is venerated as a source of food, an eternal abode of men and other created beings. She is a mother who nurtures beings during their lifetime and lovingly holds them after their death.

स्योना पृथिवि भवानृक्षरा निवेशनी ।
यच्छा नः शर्म सप्रथः ॥ ṚV I.22.15

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Thornless be thou, O Earth, spread wide before us for a dwelling-place. Vouchsafe us shelter broad and sure. (Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

In the texts on rituals, both Vedic and Āgamic, the importance of *bhūmi*, the earth, our locus, continued to grow. Earth as clay constituted the basic material for sacrificial utensils, for preparing bricks to construct the sacrificial altars. The steadfastness and stability, as well as the purity of the earth, lent sanctity and trustworthiness to these products of earth. The **Yajur-Veda** says, praising the sacrificial brick:

भूरसि भूमिरस्यदितिरसि विश्वधाया विश्वस्य भुवनस्य धर्त्री ।
पृथिवीं यच्छ पृथिवीं दृंह पृथिवीं मा हिंसीः ॥

YV XIII.18

Thou art the earth, the ground, thou art the all-sustaining Aditi, she who supporteth all the world.
Control the earth, steady the earth, do thou the earth no injury.
(Tr. R.T.H. Griffith)

The efficacy of the rites thus depends heavily on the selection of the right ground at the right location.

The second strand of ideas that developed from the early Vedic conceptions of the earth as the primordially created object, crystallized in its inclusion among the cosmic elements as representing solidity. As quoted above, even in the Vedas, the original elements, namely, water, air and earth are considered to be the primal created matter.

The cosmic element of solidity, i.e. the earth (*pṛthivī-tattva*), forms the basis of our tangible world. The concept of the material world emerging from three or four or five cosmic elements is accepted by most of the ancient Indian systems of speculation on the nature of the empirical world and its cognition.

The **Chāndogya Upaniṣad** mentions a sequence of cosmic creation in which *sat*, i.e, primordial being, produced →*tejas*; *tejas* produced the waters which then produced *anna*. *Anna* (foodgrains) here symbolizes *pṛthivī*.

तद् ऐक्षत,बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति ।
तत्तेजोऽसृजत ।
तत्तेज ऐक्षत । बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति । तदपोऽसृजत... ।
ता आप ऐक्षन्त बह्व्यः स्याम प्रजायेमहीति ।
ता अन्नमसृजन्त ।

ChUp VI.2.3–4

That (being, *sat*) considered: let me be many, let me procreate. It

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then created heat (*tejas*). That heat considered: let me be many, let me procreate. It then created the waters. Those waters considered: let us be many, let us procreate. They created grains.

The **Taittirīya Upaniṣad** gives a slightly different enumeration.

तस्माद् वा एतस्माद् आत्मन आकाशः सम्भूतः । आकाशाद् वायुः । वायोरग्निः । अग्नेरापः । अद्भ्यः पृथिवी । पृथिव्या ओषधयः । ओषधीभ्योऽन्नम् । अन्नात् पुरुषः ।

TUp II.1.1

From that (*brahman*), that is from this self, the void (*ākāśa*) came into existence, from the void came air, from air fire, from fire the waters, from the waters came earth, from earth came plants, from plants food, from food man.

The sequence of the cosmic elements of void, air, fire, water and earth emerged out of such Sāṃkhya-like statements in the Vedic literature. They were subsequently systematized in the later speculative literature.

The six systems of ancient Brāhmaṇical philosophy (*darśana-śāstra*) accepted five cosmic elements to be the constituents of the material world. Even heterodox systems, such as Buddhism, consider *bhū* to be the solid element.

कक्खळलक्खणा हि पथवीधातु, सा फरुसाकारा होति, तस्मा खरिगतं ति वुत्ता ।

ViMag XI.33

... for the earth element is characterized as hard, but its mode is rough, which is why it is called 'harsh'. (Tr. Bhikkhu Ñyāṇamoli)

The elements are put in the sequence *ākāśa* (sky/space), *vāyu* (air), *tejas* (fire), *salila* (water) and *bhū* (earth). A causal relation is maintained between each preceding element and its immediately following element. Moreover, each element is considered to possess a subtle causal existence which produces its gross elemental form. The former is called *tanmātra* (its essence) and is defined by its essential quality, namely *śabda* (sound) for *ākāśa*, *sparśa* (touch) for *vāyu*, *rūpa* (colour/visibility) for *tejas*, *rasa* (taste/fluidity) for *salila* and *gandha* (smell/fragrance) for earth. Because of the chain of causal relationships between the elements, each successive element possesses all the essential qualities belonging to its preceding elements.

शब्दस्पर्शरूपरसगन्धगुणाद् गन्धतन्मात्रात् पञ्चगुणा पृथिवी ।

YuDīp on SāṃKā 38

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The earth has five qualities because it is caused by *gandhatanmātra* which possesses all (four) qualities (i.e.) sound, touch, colour, taste and smell.

As explained in the **Yoga-Sūtras** and elaborated in the commentary by Vyāsa, in order to control the mind from straying into divergent phenomena, meditation is recommended on the essential nature of the latter. By knowing its essence the yogin arrives at the material source of each phenomenon. Without such a strong foundation (*dṛḍhabhūmi*) to hold onto, meditation may become chaotic (cf. YSū I.14). This method is described in the **Yoga-Sūtra** (I.34,40–45; II.18) and the commentary by Vyāsa on it explains why a yogin must understand the nature and position of the gross elements. The **Yoga-Sūtra** IV.14 and Vyāsa's commentary thereon further explain the gradual process by which phenomena become gross and diverse, causing mental distraction and hence suffering:

... शब्दादीनां मूर्तिसमानजातीयकानामेकः परिणामः पृथिवीपरमाणु-
स्तन्मात्रावयवस्तेषांचैकः परिणामः पृथिवी गौर्वृक्षः पर्वत इत्येवमादिः ।

YSūBh IV.14

The sound and other [perceptible objects], belonging to the general class of limitation-in-extent, have a single mutation, an atom of earth a part of a fine-substance (*tanmātra*). And these [atoms] have a single mutation, the earth, a cow, a tree, a mountain, for examples. (Tr. J.H. Woods)

Like all the orthodox *darśana-śāstras*, the Āyurvedic texts accepted the Sāṃkhya concept of the elements as the source of all conglomerate phenomena, including the human body. Thus, the **Caraka Saṃhitā** describes the basic ingredients of an embryo as follows:

गर्भस्तु खल्वन्तरिक्षवाय्वग्नितोयभूमिविकारश्चेतनाधिष्ठानभूतः ।

CarSam ŚāSthā IV.6

Indeed an embryo is a modification of *ākāśa, vāyu, agni, toyas* and *bhū* and the seat of consciousness.

Persons, things and medicinal herbs are characterised by the predominance of the essential qualities of one or more elements that produce them (cf. SuSam ŚāSthā I.19–20; CarSam ŚāSthā V.5; *ibid.* IV.12 and CarSam SūSthā XXVI.11; also cf. BṛSam LXVIII.90 and 109).

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स्निग्धद्विजत्वग्नखरोमकेशाच्छाया सुगन्धा च महीसमुत्था ।
तुष्ट्यर्थलाभाभ्युदयान् करोति धर्मस्य चाहन्यहनि प्रवृत्तिम् ॥

BṛSam LXVIII.90

The bodily lustre born of the earth (element), makes up the teeth, skin, nails, and hair of the body and head glossy, and smells good; it bestows contentment, wealth and progress in life, and causes continuous engagement in religious and meritorious acts. (Based on the tr. by M.R. Bhat)

महीस्वभावः शुभपुष्पगन्धः सम्भोगवान् सुश्वसनः स्थिरश्च ।

BṛSam LXVIII.109ab

A man of earthly nature possesses the smell of fragrant flowers, enjoys pleasures, has a sweet breath, and is firm in character. (Tr. M.R. Bhat)

In the texts on mythology the earth is considered more concretely. The material earth, both as an element and as the land, begins to acquire a fixed colour (yellow or black), as well as a fixed form (quadrangular or round) and so forth. The **Viṣṇu Purāṇa** fixes the size of the earth at five million *yojanas*, which comprises the continents, oceans, and mountain ranges (cf. ViPur II.4.97; also cf. AgPur 119.28).

The **Matsya Purāṇa** says the earth is circular:

तारकासन्निवेशस्य दिवि यावत्तु मण्डलम् ।
पर्याप्तसन्निवेशस्य भूमेस्तावत्तु मण्डलम् ॥ MatPur CXXIV.18

The space in the firmament studded with the stars is equal in circumference to the magnitude of entire earth below. (Tr. H.H. Wilson)

In the **Devī Purāṇa**, the earth is compared to a lotus.

पृथिवी पद्मं दिशः पत्रं मेरुस्तस्या तु कर्णिका ।

DPur 46.4

The earth is (like) a lotus, the quarters are its leaves and mount Meru is its pericarp.

The **Viṣṇu Purāṇa** also refers to the origin of the earth from Viṣṇu's feet. This is based on the **Ṛgveda** (X.129) mentioned above:

सैषा धात्री विधात्री च धारिणी पोषणी तथा ।
सर्वस्य तु ततः पृथ्वी विष्णुपादतलोद्भवा ॥ ViPur I.13.92

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Figure 48: Varāha with Bhūdevī and Nāga: Deogarh, 9th Cent. A.D.

> The Earth, the mother, the nurse, the receptacle, and nourisher of all existent things, was produced from the sole of the foot of Viṣṇu. (Tr. H.H. Wilson)

However, the Purāṇas, including the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas quoted above, also faithfully reproduce the earth's emergence from under the primordial waters as stated by the Vedas. Now the earth achieves full anthropomorphic form and is the goddess Earth. She is now associated with Brahmā and Viṣṇu, who are said to have rescued her from the hands of the demons. The Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas tend to make Viṣṇu the prime mover of that act.

> एवं यज्ञवराहेण भूत्वा भूतहितार्थिना ।
> उद्धृता पृथिवी देवी रसातलगता पुरा ॥
>
> ViSm I.12
>
> Thus, in the distant past, with the purpose of bestowing good on beings, the Lord, assuming the form of Yajñavarāha, rescued the divine Earth who was deep in the water (*rasātala*).

In the Vaiṣṇava Āgamas Viṣṇu not only rescues her from the waters but also marries her. Hence, in these Śāstras Viṣṇu has two spouses, Śrī and Bhū,

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representing cosmic matter, i.e. *prakṛti*.

The second set of myths about the earth personified as a cow is also a prominent motif in the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas. These myths elaborate on the story of harnessing the earth to yield grain and other crops, a process metaphorically described as milking the earth-cow. The person associated with this primordial farming is king Pṛthu.

स कल्पयित्वा वत्सं तु मनुं स्वायंभुवं प्रभुम् ।
स्वपाणौ पृथिवीनाथो दुदोह पृथिवीं पृथुः ॥
सस्यजातानि सर्वाणि प्रजानां हितकाम्यया ।
तेनान्नेन प्रजास्तात वर्तन्तेऽद्यापि नित्यशः ॥

ViPur I.13.87–88

... and the King Pṛthu therefore, having made Svāyaṃbhuva Manu the calf, milked the earth and received the milk into his own hand, for the benefit of mankind. Thence proceeded all kinds of corn and vegetables upon which people subsist now and perpetually.
(Tr. H.H. Wilson)

It is stated in the **Viṣṇu Purāṇa** (I.13.90–91) that the earth was milked by gods, sages, demons, and other beings. They each had their own milkers and calves of their own species.

When Pṛthu first chased the earth-cow, she finally surrendered herself to his mercy. Then he tenderly revived her by granting her safety:

प्राणप्रदाता स पृथुर्यस्माद् भूमेरभूत् पिता ।
ततस्तु पृथिवीसंज्ञामवापाखिलधारिणी ॥

ViPur I.13.89

By granting life to the earth, Pṛthu was her father, and then (she) derived the patronymic appellation Pṛthivī (the daughter of Pṛthu).
(Tr. H.H. Wilson)

Both these mythological forms, the goddess Bhū and the earth-cow are represented in various art forms (cf. also MatPur X.35). The goddess Bhū can be seen in most South Indian Viṣṇu temples accompanying the main image.

शुकवर्णा मही कार्या दिव्याभरणभूषिता ।
चतुर्भुजा सौम्यवपुश्चन्द्रांशुसदृशाम्बरा ॥
रत्नपात्रं सस्यपात्रं पात्रमोषधिसंयुतम् ।
पद्मं करे च कर्तव्यं भुवो यादवनन्दन ॥

VDhPur III.61.1–2

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Figure 49: Bhūdevī: bronze, 15th Cent. A.D., Tanjore Art Gallery

> O son of Yadus, the image of the earth is to be made with a parrot-like (dark) complexion and divine ornaments. She has four arms and a pleasing bodily appearance, and is clad in moon-white clothes. One should put in her (four) hands a vessel full of jewels, a vessel full of grains, a vessel full of medicinal herbs and a lotus.

In the liturgical literature, both Vedic and Āgamic/Tāntric, all the senses of *bhū/pṛthivī* run parallel. When the **Viṣṇu Purāṇa** says:

> इज्याफलस्य भूरेषा इज्या चात्र प्रतिष्ठिता ॥
>
> ViPur II.7.11cd
>
> This earth is the world where the fruits of sacrifice (i.e. ritual *karma*) exist, and the sacrifice is firmly based on her.

It is echoing the **Taittirīya Saṃhitā** (I.1.9) where the earth is addressed as the *devayajanī*, "whereon sacrifices are offered" (tr. A.B. Keith, cf. also AV XII.1.13).

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The earth is the *karmabhūmi*, i.e. the place where beings must both act and enjoy or suffer the fruits of their significant actions (*karma*).

भरतैरावतविदेहाः कर्मभूमयोऽन्यत्र देवकुरूत्तरकुरुभ्यः ॥

भरता ऐरावता विदेहाश्च पञ्च, पञ्च, एताः कर्मभूमय इति व्यपदिश्यन्ते। ... अथ कथं कर्मभूमित्वम्? शुभाशुभलक्षणस्य कर्मणोऽधिष्ठानत्वात् । ननु सर्वं लोकत्रितयं कर्मणोऽधिष्ठानमेव । तत एवं प्रकर्षगतिर्विज्ञास्यते, प्रकर्षेण यत्कर्मणोऽधिष्ठानमिति । तत्राशुभकर्मणस्तावत्सप्तमनरकप्रापणस्य भरतादिष्वेवार्जनम्, शुभस्य च सर्वार्थसिद्धादि स्थानविशेषप्रापणस्य कर्मण उपार्जनं तत्रैव, कृष्यादिलक्षणस्य षड्विधस्य कर्मणः पात्रदानादिसहितस्य तत्रैवारम्भात्कर्मभूमिव्यपदेशो वेदितव्यः ।

SaSi on TaSū III.37

Bharata, Airāvata, and Videha excluding Devakuru and Uttarakuru, are the regions of labour.

Bharata, Airāvata and Videha are five each. All these are described as the regions of action. Why are these called the regions of action? This is because these are the seats of good and evil deeds. But do not the three worlds constitute the seat of activity? Yes. Still these must be understood to be the seats of plenty of activity. For instance, demerit capable of plunging a being in the seventh infernal region is acquired only in Bharata etc. Similarly, merit which leads to the highest celestial state such as *Sarvārthasiddhi devas* is also acquired in the same regions only. Similarly, the six kinds of occupations such as agriculture along with gifts to the worthy obtain in these regions only. Hence these are called the regions of action. (Tr. S.A. Jain)

There are also a number of regions of enjoyment (*bhogabhūmi*, cf. TiPa IV.382–383, 2954; SaSi III. 37, etc.) which offer the soul the opportunity to live out its accumulated *karma*. Jaina doctrine makes this point by calling the earth *madhyaloka* (the middle realm). It is located in the middle of the world (→*loka*), and consists of a system of alternating concentric rings of oceans and continents (*dvīpa*). Our own continent, 'Jambudvīpa' is in the centre of it. Bhārata lies within Jambudvīpa. This is called the *karmabhūmi*, where the Tīrthaṅkaras were active.

The Jaina equation of *bhūmi* with *loka* finds its parallel in the Purāṇic/Āgamic tradition which posits seven layers (*tala*) of nether regions under the surface of the earth. This creates a symmetrical cosmos, since *bhūrloka*, this earth, has seven regions or *lokas* above it. The **Agni Purāṇa** gives a definition of *bhūrloka* which seems to be somewhat narrow in its scope. It

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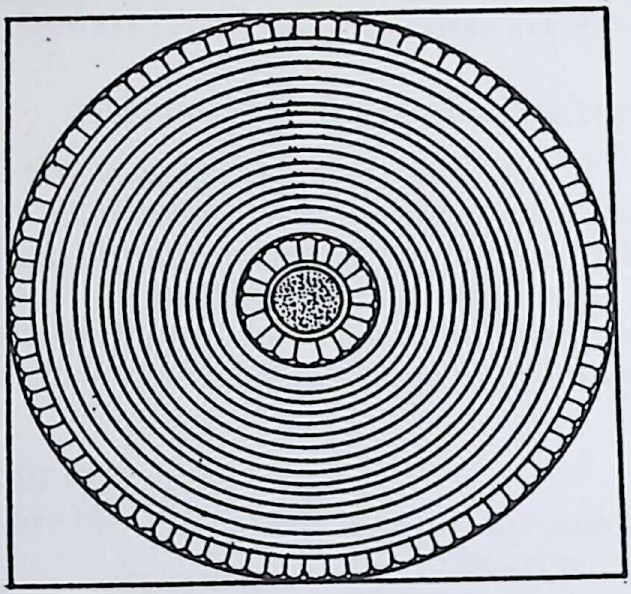

Figure 50: *Madhyabhūmi*: the islands (*dvīpas*) and oceans (*samudras*) of the middle country, Jain Cosmology (Gouache on paper, 18th Cent. A.D. Rajasthan)

says "that which can be reached by walking on foot is to be known as *bhūrloka* (*padagamyāstu bhūrloka*)". This definition successfully excludes the regions above and below the surface of the earth, but what about lakes, rivers, seas and oceans? Perhaps the author confused the planet earth with the ground earth.

The earth is always remembered as the sustaining, sheltering mother. A humorous episode in the domestic life of Śiva, Pārvatī and their two sons is narrated in the **Śiva Purāṇa**. In a competition between the two brothers to see who could circumambulate the earth first, Skanda rode his peacock at top speed and in a short while completed his round. However, Gaṇeśa, whose mount is a rat, seemed not to have moved at all. When challenged by his parents, he declared that he had finished his circumambulation long before while Skanda was still busy flying. When Śiva and the Goddess asked him how he had managed to do this in such a short time, since the earth is so immense, with its seven continents encircled by oceans and full of vast impenetrable forests, Gaṇeśa calmly answered that they, his parents have witnessed him doing so when he worshipped and circumambulated them, the parents of all the universe (ŚPur II.4.19.35). Here, the Purāṇa identifies Śiva and his consort with the Vedic cosmic parents Dyāvāpṛthivī.

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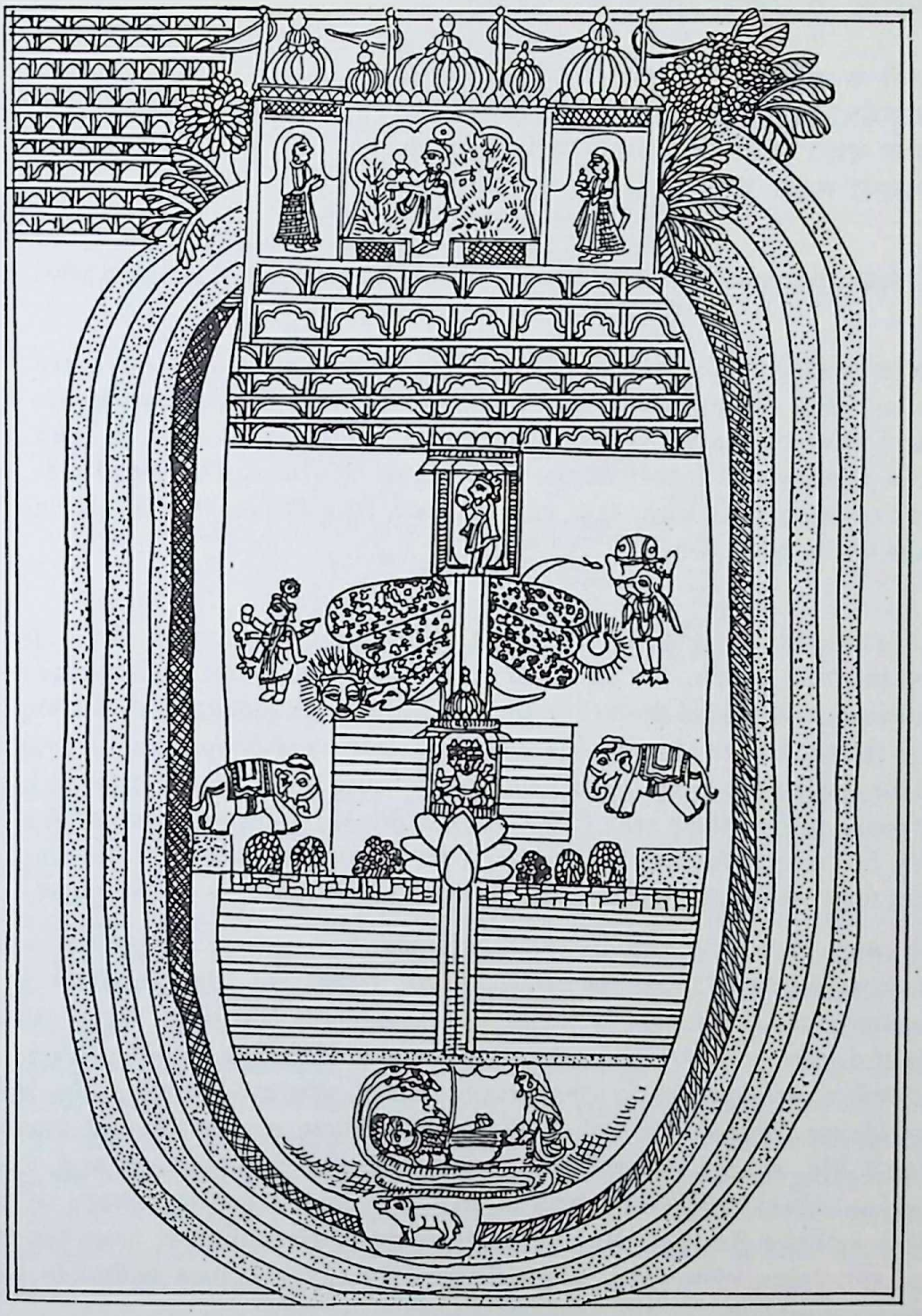

Figure 51: *Brahmāṇḍa*, the egg-shaped universe: Rājasthānī painting, 18th Cent. A.D.

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प्रकृतिः सर्वभूतानां भूमिर्वै शाश्वती मता ॥
* * *
भूमौ जायन्ति पुरुषा भूमौ निष्ठां व्रजन्ति च ।
चतुर्विधो हि लोकोऽयं योऽयं भूमिगुणात्मकः ॥
एषा माता पिता चैव जगतः पृथिवीपते ।
नानया सदृशं भूतं किंचिदस्ति जनाधिप ॥

MBh XIII.61.35cd and 46–47

It has been said that the earth is the original source of all creatures.

...

Men originated from the earth and it is to the earth that they return when they disappear. Living creatures are divided into four classes and have the earth as their primordial essence. The earth is both the mother and father of the universe of creatures, O king. There is no element, O king, that can compare with the earth. (Based on the tr. by M.N. Dutt)

The earth as the ground or site is of supreme importance for a person engaged in ritual action. For all ritual acts, the ground, *bhūmi*, where the rite is to take place, is a crucial factor. Even in a consecrated place, inside a temple or a family shrine, before starting the daily ritual, the worshipper has to pray and propitiate the divine Earth – Pṛthivī, the sacred ground where the worshipper must spread his purified seat (LT XXXIII. 38–39). The selection of a site is crucially important for any ritual, be it for making an altar for worship and sacrifice, for constructing a religious pavilion or temple or a divine palace.

The word *bhūmi* in the Buddhist systems has several meanings, including: station, location, place of origin, stage, phase etc. Buddhaghosa in his commentary on the **Dīgha Nikāya** (I.54), explains the term 'eight stations of people' (*aṭṭha purisa-bhūmiyo*) mentioned by Makkhali-Gosālo. These are: *manda-bhūmi, khidda-bhūmi, vimaṃsana-bhūmi, ujugata-bhūmi, sekha-bhūmi, samana-bhūmi, jina-bhūmi* and *paññā-bhūmi*. These are stations or stages of a person's life, from birth till the perfect stage of renunciation and mental equilibrium. Makkhali-Gosālo was an Ājīvaka, and a contemporary of both Mahāvīra and the Buddha. But his views were totally different from the Buddhist or the Jaina view. The **Visuddhimagga** (IV.9.3) uses *bhūmi* in words like *kāmāvacarabhūmi*, in the sense of plane.

The **Abhidharma Kośa** (II.23) uses the term *bhūmi* to mean, 'the place of origin' (see tr. by Louis de la Vallee Poussin, p. 152). Vasubandhu uses the term *bhūmi* in the word *mahābhūmika*; so called because it is the ground and the place of origin of the great *dharmas*. These are the *dharmas* of great extent

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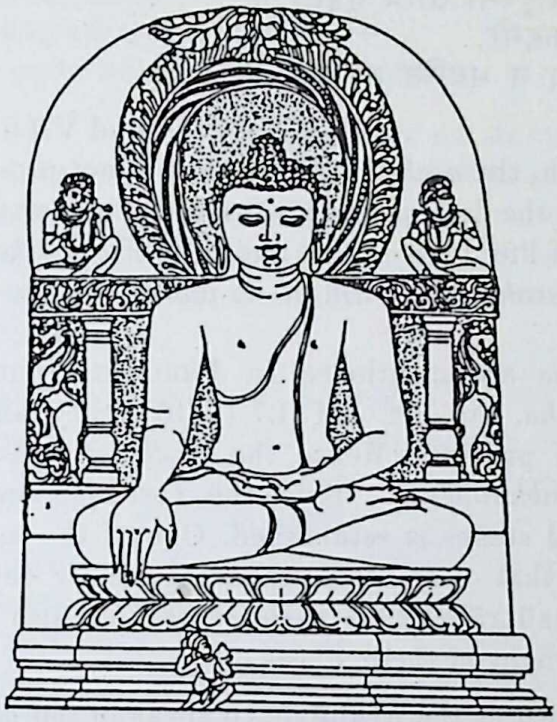

Figure 52: Buddha in *bhūmisparśamudrā*: Sarnath, Gupta period

which are prevalent everywhere. One calls the *dharma mahābhūmika* because it is inherent in the *mahābhūmi*, so called because it is present always in every thought.

In the life of the Buddha, the earth plays an important role as a witness to his enlightenment and as a symbol of unshakable firmness. In Buddhist iconography "This is represented by the figure of Akṣobhya, the immutable (Tib. *mi-bskyod-pa*). As a sign of his unshakable, steadfast nature, he is touching the earth (*bhūmisparśa-mūdrā*) with the finger-tips of his right hand, because the earth is the symbol of the immutable, the solid, the concrete, the formed." (Lama Anagarika Govinda, p. 108). This gesture of touching the earth is mostly connected with Buddha's victory over Māra and his final enlightenment. It is represented in Buddhist art since ca the 2nd Cent. A.D. and has found many expressions in Gandhara, Kushana, Gupta etc. sculpture as well as in Tibetan and Far Eastern sculpture and painting (cf. KāCaT 171: ... *paryaṅke vāmahasto bhavati bhuvigato dakṣiṇo jānudeśāt, bhūsparśā'kṣobhyamudrā* ...).

That the qualities of the earth are embodied in the Arhat is also stressed by the **Dhammapada**:

पठविसमो नो विरुज्झति,

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इन्दखिलुपमो तादि सुव्वतो ।
रहदोव अपेतकद्दमो,
संसारा न भवन्ति तादिनो ॥

DhPad VII.6

Like the earth, the *arahat* is patient and is not provoked to respond in anger; like the door-post he is firm; he is unperturbed by the ups and downs of life; he is serene and pure like a lake free from mud. For such an *arahat* there will be no more rebirths. (Tr. D.M. Tin)

Though *bhūmis* are mentioned in Buddhist Tantras as actual places of pilgrimage (*pīṭha*, etc., cf. HT I.7.10–18), they are identified with the stages of spiritual progress. Hence the *Bodhisattva* is called "Lord of the Ten Stages", *daśabhūmīśvara*. Here the correspondence between external places and internal stages is established. One of the most important uses of *bhūmi/bhūmikā* is that of spiritual stages, as mainly developed in Mahāyāna. In the **Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra** these *bhūmis* are also called *vihāra*, because the *bodhisattvas* delight in these stages.

Several texts such as the **Mahāvastu** speak of ten *bhūmis*, which has been systematized in the **Daśabhūmika-Sūtra**. The names of these stages are meaningful (cf. *ibid.*):

1. *pramuditā*: delightful
2. *vimalā*: immaculate
3. *prabhākarī*: luminous
4. *arciṣmatī*: radiant
5. *sudurjayā*: invincible
6. *abhimukhī*: directed toward
7. *dūraṅgamā*: far-reaching
8. *acalā*: steady
9. *sādhumatī*: full of goodness
10. *dharmameghā*: 'cloud of dharma'.

These stages mark the way to bodhisattvahood. In the following commentary the connection between the perfections (*pāramitā*) and *bhūmis* is established:

दशानां भूमीनां प्रमुदितादीनां चतुर्विंशतिपीठोपपीठादिलक्षणानामीश्वरः प्रधानं सहजज्ञानाकारेण व्यापकत्वात् । अस्यायमर्थः –

दानात् प्रमुदितो योगी शीलवान् विमलो भवेत् ।
क्षान्त्या प्रभाकरी वीर्यादर्चिष्मान् पुण्यवानसौ ॥
ध्यानादभिमुखाकृष्टः प्रज्ञया तु सुदुर्जयः ।

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दूरङ्गमो महोपायो बलवानचलो भवेत् ॥
साधुः (श्च) प्रणिधानेन धर्ममेघस्तु ज्ञानवान् ।
जिनस्तथागतः प्रत्यात्मवेद्य एकादशो भवेत् ॥

Amṛtakaṇikā on ĀryaMS p.29

He is the Lord of ten *bhūmis* namely of *pramuditā* and others which are differentiated into twenty-four divisions characterised by *pīṭhas* and *upapīṭhas*. The principal is the all-pervading one which shines and permeates all by its nature of innate/inborn knowingness. The meaning is as follows:

The yogin becomes exceedingly delighted because of offering (*dānāt*). He becomes ordained with high morals and is free from defilement. By means of forbearance he becomes the illuminator (of all). By the perfection of *vīrya*, energy he becomes ordained with light and a person of merit. By the perfection of *dhyāna*, meditation, he causes everything to come near. By means of the perfection of *prajñā* he becomes indomitable. The highest means is called *dūraṅgama* by which he becomes the owner of mighty strength and steadiness. By means of mindfulness he becomes *sādhu* but *dharmamegha* is that which is the bestower of knowledge. The victorious one is Tathāgata who is known by all and that is the eleventh.
(Tr. H.N. Chakravarty)

Other texts enumerate seven *bhūmis* (cf. BoBhū, Laṅkāvatāra-Sūtra), or they speak of twelve *bhūmis* or stages on the way to perfect bodhisattvahood (cf. HT I.7.11, SaddhPuSū VII, etc.).

Similarly, in the **Yoga-Sūtra** of Patañjali *bhūmi* means stages of meditation:

तस्य सप्तधा प्रान्तभूमिः प्रज्ञा ॥

YSū II.27

For him (there is) insight seven-fold and advancing in stages to the highest. (Tr. J.H. Woods)

The fact that seven stages of wisdom are mentioned but not explained shows that these seven *bhūmis* were well-known at the time of Patañjali (cf. also Sūtra III.6: *tasya bhūmiṣu viniyogaḥ*, saying that *saṃyama* should be applied to all the stages of yoga).

The **Śiva-Sūtras**, a basic text of Kashmir Śaivism, also use the term *bhūmikā* to denote the various phases of experience and consciousness a yogi passes through. Kṣemarāja elaborates on the Sūtra:

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विस्मयो योगभूमिकाः ॥

यथा सातिशयवस्तुदर्शने कस्यचित् विस्मयो भवति तथा अस्य महायोगिनो नित्यं तत्तद्वेद्यावभासामर्शाभोगेषु निःसामान्यातिशयनवनवचमत्कारचिद्घनस्वात्मावेश-वशात् स्मेरस्मेरस्तिमितविकसितसमस्तकरणचक्रस्य यो विस्मयोऽनवच्छिन्नानन्दे स्वात्मनि अपरितृप्तत्वेन मुहुर्मुहुराश्चर्यायमाणता; ता एव योगस्य परतत्त्वैक्यस्य संबन्धिन्यो भूमिकाः; तदध्यारोहविश्रान्तिसूचिकाः परिमिता भूमयो, न तु कन्दबिन्द्वाद्यनुभववृत्तयः ।

ŚSūVim I.12

The stations and stages of *yoga* constitute a fascinating wonder.

As a person is struck with wonder by seeing something extraordinary, even so there is a pleasant surprise for the great *yogī* who notices in mute wonder an expansion (in the power) of his entire complex of senses, as they come fully under the influence of the inner Self which is a mass of consciousness and full of unique, pre-eminent and ever-new delight of I-consciousness which blossoms forth in the experience of the various objects of perception. The *yogī* has this experience in himself that is full of uninterrupted joy – a joy with which he never feels satiated. This fascinating wonder betokens the various stations and stages of *yoga* which means communion with the Highest Reality. These are definite stations indicative of the repose of the *yogī* in the higher consciousness during the powers of his ascent to the Highest Reality, not experiences which one may notice in *mūlādhāra* or the psychic centre between the eyebrows. (Tr. J. Singh)

A similar meaning is found in Utpaladeva's **Śivastotrāvalī**:

उल्लङ्घ्य विविधदैवत सोपानक्रममुपेयशिवचरणान् ।
आश्रित्याप्यधरतरां भूमिं नाद्यापि चित्रमुज्झामि ॥

ŚSto IV.2

Although I have gradually traversed
The steps of the various gods,
Having as support the feet of Śiva,
What a wonder it is that not even now
Do I part with this lowliest of states! (Tr. C.R. Bailly)

The meaning of *bhūmikā* as 'place, site' is not lost sight of in the context of spiritual experience:

कां भूमिकां नाधिशेषे किं तत्स्याद्यन्न ते वपुः ।
श्रान्तस्तेनाप्रयासेन सर्वतस्त्वामवाप्नुयाम् ॥ŚSto VI.9

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On what site do you not dwell?
What exists that does not exist in your body?
I am wearied!
Therefore let me reach you everywhere,
Without difficulty. (Tr. C.R. Bailly)

Utpaladeva prays to the Lord to be raised to "a state of perfection" (*siddhibhūmi*, ŚSto XIX.13).

The use of the term *bhūmi*, to mean levels (also called *bhūmikā*) and layers (*tala*) persisted in the development of religious ideas. The **Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha** too speaks about the levels of spiritual experience (*jñānabhūmikā*) and mentions seven such stages (III.118.2–16). The 16th century Vedānta philosopher Madhusūdana Sarasvatī developed on that basis his account of eleven levels of devotional experience which he called *bhakti-bhūmikā* (BhRas I.33–35).

Manifestation in the Arts

The art-form most directly connected with the earth is architecture, whether secular or sacred. In the **Aparājitapṛcchā** (I.33) we are told that three phenomena are of crucial importance for any Śāstra concerned with architecture and the like. These are: the earth, which is the substratum of all such constructions, Pṛthu, who is the patron lord of the earth and Viśvakarman, the divine planner and architect. Actually, Viśvakarman himself planned and beautified the earth aided by his four sons Ajita and the rest whom he took on an airborne vehicle called Puṣpaka to have a proper view of the entire surface of the earth:

पुष्पकेऽस्माकमारुह्य मेरुमावृत्य दक्षिणम् ।
आलोकय भूतधात्रीम् आसमुद्रान्तामेदिनीम् ॥

AparPṛ I.33

Having mounted our (airborne vehicle), Puṣpaka, observe the earth (*medinī*), who is the bearer of all created beings, starting from the southern Meru, upto the ocean girdle (of the earth).

Bhojarāja, an earlier author, narrates at the beginning of his **Samarāṅgaṇa-Sūtradhāra** a myth about how the earth, Pṛthu and Viśvakarman collaborated in fashioning the earth as a human habitat. This is how architects interpret the Purāṇic myth of Pṛthu's taming of the wild earth.

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The most important and indeed the primary task is to determine a site. Everything depends on it. Testing the suitability of a piece of land for religious or secular construction depends on its practical, ecological and mystical qualities.

चतुर्णामधिकाराणां भूरेवादौ प्रवक्ष्यते ।
भूतानामादिभूतत्वाद् आधारत्वाज्जगत्स्थितेः ॥

Mayam II.9

Of the four categories (of dwelling places, *vāstu*), however, it is the Earth which is said to occupy the first place, since, for beings, it is she who was (created) before all else and who is the support for the stability of the world. (Tr. B. Dagens)

The importance of selecting a flawless site for religious activities is underscored in the prayer of the architect/sculptor in the same text:

निरुजा मुदिता सघना प्रथिता यशसा महदद्भुतवीर्ययुता ।
सततं निरुपद्रवकर्मयुता पृथिवी पृथु जीवतु धर्मविधेः ॥

Mayam XVIII.197

Let the earth who is in good health, happy, rich, of renowned fame, full of great and marvellous prowess, associated with untroubled ritual performances, ever live in the ways of religious acts. (Tr. B. Dagens)

There are various methods of testing the suitability of a building site.

भूमिमादौ परीक्षेत शुभलक्षणलक्षिताम् ।
पूर्वोदक्प्रवणां धन्यां तथा वै दक्षिणोन्नताम् ॥
न तथा शिकटच्छिन्नां नान्यत्तोयपरिप्लुताम् ।
वल्मीकमूषिकावासश्वभ्रकण्टकितैर्द्रुमैः ॥
विहीनां मृदुसंस्पर्शां कठिनां चाप्यनूषराम् ।
न तथा यवसंस्थानां नेभवज्रोपमां तथा ॥
न शूर्पकूर्मसंस्थानां शक्तिहीनां तथैव च ।
सम्पूर्यमाणां कृमिभिस्तथाधिकमृदं शुभाम् ॥
गर्भे च कुसुमं यस्यां न म्लानिमुपगच्छति ।
न निर्वाणमवाप्नोति यस्यां दीपश्च भार्गव ॥
उदकं च तथा यस्यां शीघ्रं राम न जीर्यते ।
सा प्रशस्ता क्षितिस्तस्यां निवेशं कारयेद् बुधः ॥

VDhPur II.29.2–7

First one should examine the earth possessing auspicious marks. Blessed is that ground where water flows towards the east and also

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is elevated on the south. It should not have patches of sand, nor should it be flooded with (excessive waters) from another stream. It should be free from anthills, holes which are nests of rats, and bushes of thorns. It should feel soft to touch and (should be) hard but not barren. Its shape should not be like barley, nor like the forehead of an elephant. Its surface should not be (hollow) like a winnowing fan, nor (arched) like a tortoise. It should not be devoid of strength. It should not be full of worms. It should not be excessively dusty. A flower placed on (the surface) should not fade, nor, O descendant of Bhṛgu, should a lamp (lighted and placed on it) extinguish. O Rāma, water placed on it should not dry up fast. Such a site is most suitable and the wise should let his dwelling be constructed there. (Tr. P. Shah)

The **Mayamata** defines a building site as follows:

भूमिप्रासादयानानि शयनं च चतुर्विधम् ।
भूरेव मुख्यवस्तु स्यात् तत्र जातानि यानि हि ॥
* * *
वर्णगन्धरसाकार दिक्शब्दस्पर्शनैरपि ।
परीक्ष्यैवं यथायोग्यं गृहीतावधि निश्चिता ॥
या सा भूमिरितिख्याता वर्णानां च विशेषतः ।

Mayam II.2, 4–5ab

(An abode, *vāstu*) is of four kinds, earth, place, vehicle and bed. The earth is the principal (abode) because it is on her that all others are constructed. ... When the colour, odour, taste, shape, orientation, sound and texture [of the soil] have been properly tested in a piece of land and when its boundary is fixed then it is known to be a building site (*bhūmi*), which is different for each *varṇa*. (Tr. B. Dagens)

The **Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa** (III.93.32–33) gives the colours and tastes of ground suitable for the four *varṇas*. These are white, red, yellow and black according to the kinds of grass that grows there, viz. *kuśa*, reed, *kāśa* and *darbha*, respectively. Again, their tastes are sweet, astringent, sour and salty respectively, and are suitable for *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas, vaiśyas* and *śūdras*.

Here *bhūmi* means a site as well as ground or clay. Some practical tests recommended to determine the hardness of the ground of the site make that clear.

अरत्निमात्रमधोगर्ते परीक्ष्यं स्नातपुरणे ॥
अधिके म्रियमाप्नोति न्यूने हानिं समे समम् ।

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फालकृष्टेऽथवा देशे सर्वबीजानि वापयेत् ॥
त्रिपञ्चसप्तरात्रे च यत्रारोहन्ति तान्यपि ।
ज्येष्ठोत्तमा कनिष्ठाभूर्वर्ज्जनीयतरा सदा ॥

MatPur CCLIII.16cd–18

(On the site, one) should dig a hole, a cubit wide and fill it up with the excavated earth. If the loose earth's volume is greater than the hollow dug up, then building there will bring prosperity (to the builder), if it is less it will be harmful to build there and if it is of equal volume the result will be neutral. Alternatively, one should plough the land and sow all types of grains there. If within three, five or seven days the sprouts become long it is the best ground, if the sprouts are tiny the land should be avoided.

The meaning 'soil' for *bhū* is also found in the **Bṛhat Saṃhitā** (LV.2). The author recommends the following treatment to soften the texture of the soil. One should first sow sesame seeds on the ground and then when the plants are in bloom crush them in the soil.

However, where the **Mayamata** (II.2) uses the word *bhūmi*, the **Mānasāra** (III.2 and 7) uses the word *dharā* and *mahī*. Both these words mean the earth as a whole. However, it is clear that the site and the soil where a foundation is to be laid are equally important. The **Śilpa Prakāśa** says:

प्रासादस्य मूलो भूमिः भूम्याकारे च गर्भकः ।
भूमिः सा द्विविधा मुख्या समा वा विषमा तथा ॥

ŚiPrak II.164

[The area of] the ground (*bhūmi*) of a temple is its base. The shape of a temple is made according to the shape of the ground-plan. The plan is mainly of two types, square and rectangular. (Tr. A. Boner)

When *bhūmi* is used in the sense of a ground plan, the term *bhūmi-kṣetra* is sometimes used.

धरेव कर्णिकक्षेत्रमाकर्षयन्ति स्थापकाः ।

ततः स्थापकाः मध्यमारुह्य कर्णिकक्षेत्रमाचरन्ति ।
मण्डलमध्ये द्वे मध्यरेखे लिखन्ति, मध्यरेखा मध्यप्रस्थरेखा च भवति।
सममानेन तत्रोपलभन्ते चतुष्खण्डक्षेत्राणि चतुर्द्वीपां पृथिवीमिव; एषा भूमिक्षेत्रस्य भावना ।

VSUp II.13

The *sthāpakas* trace the *karṇikakṣetra* (rhombus) as the earth (*dharā*).

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Then the *sthāpakas* draw the rhombus starting from the centre, and they trace two centre-lines within the circle, they are the vertical middle line (*madhyarekhā*) and the horizontal middle line (*madhyaprastha*). There they obtain four parts of the same measure, like the four continents of the earth. This is the conception (*bhāvanā*) of the earth-field. (Tr. A. Boner and B. Bäumer)

This concept that the *bhūmi-kṣetra* somehow corresponds to the earth (*pṛthivī*) with its continents is important in the ritual context. The ground or floor where the seat of the divinity is set up represents the entire earth (*bhūrloka*). Accordingly, during the consecration ceremony of the site-ground, the worshipper meditates on the earth:

ध्यात्वा धरातलं सर्वं दिग्द्विपेन्द्र समायुतम् ॥
ससागरं सशैलेन्द्रमनन्तस्योपरि स्थितम् ।

Mayaṃ XVIII.141cd–142ab

Having meditated on the earth in her entirety, together with the protector lords of the cardinal points, with all oceans, with all great mountains as she is balanced on the head of the serpent Ananta.

The same idea is depicted in cosmograms like the *Śrīyantra* which symbolise the universe as the temple of the cosmic sovereign Goddess. The diagram is enclosed in an outer square called *bhūpura* which represents the earth where the performer of the ritual dwells and which, in this case, is conceived to be the site of the cosmic abode of the Goddess.

चक्रस्य नवधात्वं च कथयामि तव प्रिये ।
आदिमं भूत्रयेण स्याद्...

YoHT I.79cd–80a

I shall tell you my beloved, the nine-fold nature of the (Śrī)cakra. The first three (square) enclosures are (assigned) to the earth.

The Tantras regularly equate the microcosm with the macrocosm as a part of the daily meditation programme both at the start of the daily ritual worship of the Tāntric's chosen divinity and at the end of his/her ritual day. The microcosm is envisaged as a group of vertically arranged centres, *cakras*. The bottom *cakra* is most often designated as the *mūlādhāra*, that basic substratum. This is then equated with the whole earth. At the same time its identity with the cosmic element earth is kept in mind as well as its divine personality.

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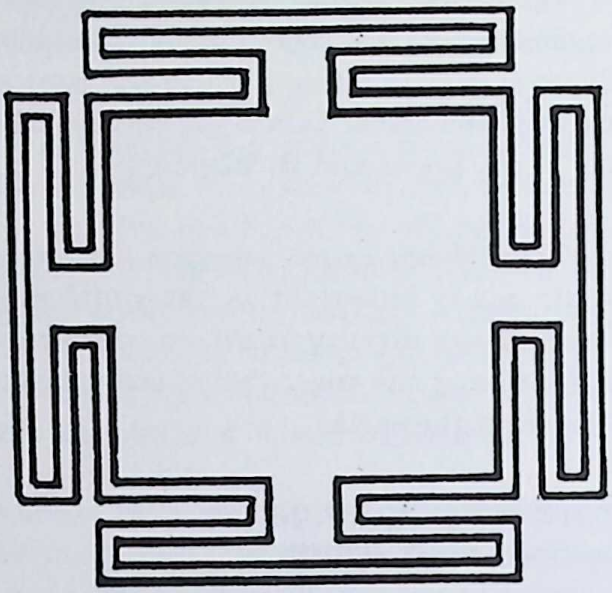

Figure 53: *Bhūpura* of *Śrīcakra* (or any other *yantra*)

विश्वबीजप्ररोहार्थं मूलाधारतया स्थितम् ।
धर्तृशक्तिमयं वन्दे धरणीरूपमीश्वरम् ॥

AbhiBhā on NŚ I.1

I salute the Lord in the form of the earth, the sustaining power (*dhartṛśakti*), who is the basic substratum (of the micro and macrocosm) in order to help the growth of the seed of the world.

Here, in this verse by Abhinavagupta, we can discern all main attributes of the earth. She is *dharaṇī*, the planet that supports all; the cosmic element which comes at the end of the creative process, being the last of the *cakras*, and the fertile ground where life grows.

The **Mānasāra** describes many ground plans in great details and uses the term *bhūmi* to denote the ground or floor and also as a synonym for *tala*, floor or storey.

एकभूमिविधिं वक्ष्ये लक्षणं वक्ष्यतेऽधुना ।

MāSā XIX.1ab

I shall now tell you the method (of constructing) of the site-plan of a single-storey building; first I will tell you its characteristics.

When the multistoreyed buildings are described, the author uses the word

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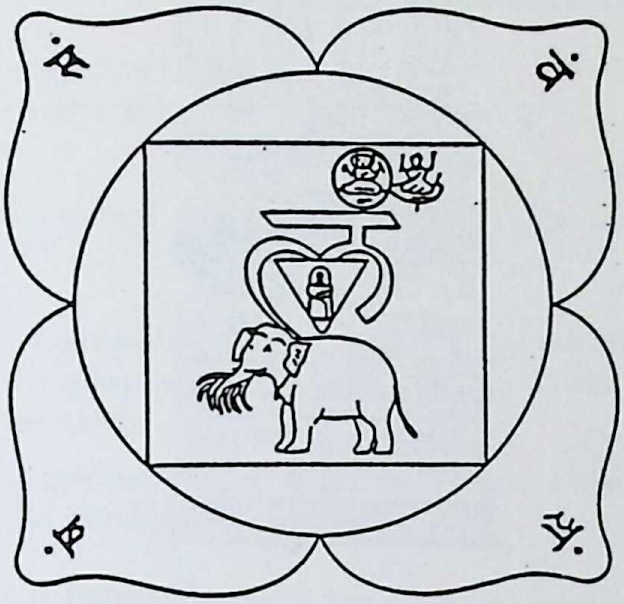

Figure 54: *Mūlādhāra cakra*: *la-bīja* for earth

tala to denote a storey:

> द्वितलानामलंकारं वक्ष्ये संक्षिप्यतेऽधुना ।
>
> MāSā XX.1ab
>
> I shall now tell you briefly about the decorations of a two-storey building.
> (cf. Mayam LIII.22 also for *bhūmi* meaning "storey".)

Another meaning of the term *bhūmi* in ancient architecture is layer, level or section, in the following example applied to the tiered roof of the *śālā*:

> लहराकृतिशाला सा कुञ्चिता कलसावधि ।
> प्रथमं लहरा-भूमिः कर्त्तव्या सावधानतः ॥
>
> ŚiPrak I.502
>
> The *śālā* (its roof), made in the form of waves, is narrowing upwards towards the *kalasa*. The first layer (*laharā-bhūmi*) should be made (established) with great care. (Tr. A. Boner)

On the spire (*śikhara*) the *bhūmis* are sections of the *koṇaka*, each crowned by an *āmalakī*:

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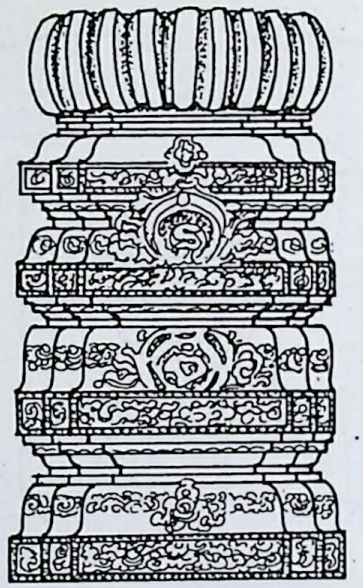

Figure 55: One level (*bhūmi*) of the *śikhara* (temple spire): Mukteśvara Temple, Bhubaneswar

भूम्यन्तेऽमलारेखा कुर्यात् पागाङ्गे केवलम् ।
भित्तिक्रोणके धारञ्च भूम्या सह समाचरेत् ॥

ŚiRaKo 279

At the top of each *bhūmi* a line of *āmalakīs* should be made, limited to the *pāgas.*
On the *bhitti-koṇaka* a vertical chase (*dhāra*) should be made (in line) with each *bhūmi.* (Tr. B. Bäumer and R.P. Das)

Spires consist of a number of either five, seven or upto ten *bhūmiṣ* or horizontal divisions, depending on the height of the temple.

Sometimes the words *bhūmi/bhūmikā* are used interchangeably as in the **Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha** and **Bhaktirasāyana.** But sometimes they refer to different things. To indicate the storey or floor of a building both *bhūmi* and *bhūmikā* are used.

भूमिकाङ्गुलमानेन मयस्याष्टोत्तरं शतम् ।
सार्द्धं हस्तत्रयं चैव कथितं विश्वकर्मणा ॥

BṛSam LVI.29

According to Maya, the height of a storey (*bhūmikā*) should be 108 digits, while according to Viśvakarman it is $3\frac{1}{2}$ cubits or 84 digits. (Tr. M.R Bhat) (cf. VDhPur III.86.5)

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Bhūmikā/bhūmi is also used in the sense of dramatic characters in Sanskrit dramaturgy, as described in the **Nāṭya-Śāstra**. Thus Bharata says:

प्रयोजितं पुत्रशतं यथाभूमिविभागशः ।
यो यस्मिन् कर्मणि यथा योग्योऽसौ तत्र{नि}योजितः ॥

NŚ I.40

I assigned to my hundred sons different roles suitable to them.
(Tr. M.M. Ghosh)

Bhūmi (lit. earth or ground) has been dealt with in the **Nāṭya-Śāstra** in the context of the auditorium and the division of space on the stages in the II and XIII chapters respectively.

The following passages are pertinent in the context of the ground to be selected and purified for building the auditorium:

भूमेर्विभागं पूर्वं तु परीक्षेत प्रयोजकः ।
ततो वास्तु प्रमाणेन प्रारभेत शुभेच्छया ॥
समा स्थिरा तु कठिना कृष्णा गौरी च या भवेत् ।
भूमिस्तत्रैव कर्तव्यः कर्तृभिर्नाट्यमण्डपः ॥
प्रथमं शोधनं कृत्वा लाङ्गलेन समुत्कृषेत् ।
अस्थिकीलकपालानि तृणगुल्मांश्च शोधयेत् ॥
शोधयित्वा वसुमतीं प्रमाणं निर्दिशेत्ततः ।

NŚ II.24–27ab

Before laying out the divisions of the site, the architect should examine the quality of the earth. After that, he should begin the construction of the building, with a desire for auspiciousness.
The ground that is even, stable, hard and black or white should be selected for erecting the *nāṭyamaṇḍapa* (theatre auditorium) by the masters.
First, one should clean (the earth) with a plough and pull out bones, nails, bowls/basins of terracotta, straws and bunches (of grass).
Having purified the earth, one should indicate the measure (of the proposed construction).

While dealing with *kakṣyā vibhāga*, i.e., division of space on the stage, *bhūmi* is mentioned as the space that gets extended or expanded through the *parikramās* (walking around) of the actors.

सैव भूमिस्तु बहुभिर्विकृष्टा स्यात् परिक्रमैः ।

NŚ XIII.17ab

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The same *bhūmi* (acting space on the stage) is known to be *vikṛṣṭa* (spread out) through many *parikramās* (moving in rounds).

Bhūmi and *bhūmikā* are sometimes used as synonyms for 'role' in drama (cf. NŚ XIII.78,79). There is a separate chapter (XXXV) entitled '*bhūmikā-vikalpa*', i.e., the assignment of roles in drama. The following passages are pertinent:

गतिवागङ्गचेष्टाभिः सत्त्वशीलस्वभावतः ।
परीक्ष्य पात्रं तज्ज्ञस्तु युञ्ज्याद् भूमिनिवेशने ॥
तस्मिन्नन्विष्य हि गुणवान् (गुणान्) कार्या (र्यः) पात्रसमाश्रया(यः) ।
न खेदजननं बुद्धेराचार्यस्य भविष्यति ॥
आचार्यः पात्रजाँश्चैव गुणाञ्ज्ञात्वा स्वभावजान् ।
ततः कुर्याद् यथायोगं नृणां भूमिनिवेशनम् ॥

NŚ XXXV.2–4

The expert should assign roles to the actor after examining his or her gait, speech, movements of the body, *sattva* (disposition of mind), *śīla* (conduct) and *svabhāva* (nature). In that context, the assignment of roles to actors should be done after searching for the requisite qualities. (If this is done) the intellect of the *ācārya* will not be subjected to exhaustion. The *ācārya* should duly make the assignment of roles to men (including women) after knowing the qualities pertaining to the nature of the actors.

अङ्गप्रत्यङ्गसंयुक्तमहीनाङ्गं वयोऽन्वितम् ।
न स्थूलं न कृशं चैव न दीर्घं न च मन्थरम् ॥
श्लिष्टाङ्गं द्युतिमन्तं च (विश्लिष्टाङ्गं) सुस्वरं प्रियदर्शनम् ।
एतैर्गुणैश्च संयुक्तं देवभूमिषु योजयेत् ॥

NŚ XXXV.5–6

One should assign the role of the gods to one who has the qualities (as enumerated in the following adjectives): endowed with all the limbs and their parts, who is not devoid of any limb, who is of young age, who is neither fat nor slender, neither tall nor bent, whose limbs are well-built, who has a glow, who has a good voice and who has a pleasant look.

One who is endowed with these qualities (is fit for being assigned divine roles).

स्थूलं प्रांशुं बृहद्देहं मेघगम्भीरनिस्वनम् ।
रौद्रस्वभावनेत्रं च स्वभावभ्रुकुटीमुखम् ॥
रक्षोदानवदैत्यानां भूमिकासु प्रयोजयेत् ।
पुरुषाणां प्रयोगस्तु तथाङ्गक्रिययान्वितः ॥

NŚ XXXV.7–8

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One who is fat, tall, big-built, has a deep voice like the sound of clouds, who has *raudra* (wrathful) nature and eyes, whose face has a natural frown, should be used in the roles of demons, devils and ogress.

The performance by men is thus comprised of the movements of the limbs.

The roles of princes or kings should be played by actors with good physical features and noble conduct (NŚ XXXV.9–11). Similarly, ministers and army chiefs should be represented by actors with distinguished features and fearless character (NŚ XXXV.12–13).

एवमन्येष्वपि तथा नाट्यधर्मविभागतः ।
देशवेषानुरूपेण पात्रं योज्यं स्वभूमिषु ॥

NŚ XXXV.15

In the same way, the actor should be employed in his respective roles in the dramatic presentation of other characters also in accordance with regional costumes.

On the other hand, roles of the lowly like servants and others, should be given to low characters:

मन्थरं वामनं कुब्जं विकृतं विकृताननम् ।
विष्टब्धनेत्रं काणाक्षं स्थूलं चिपिटनासिकम् ॥
दुर्जनं दुःस्वभावं च विकृताचारमेव च ।
दासभूमौ प्रयुञ्जीत बुधो दासाङ्गसम्भवम् ॥

NŚ XXXV.16–17

The wise one should employ in the role of a servant, one who is born of a servant, is bent, dwarf, hunch-backed, pervert with a distorted face, squint-eyed, monoculous, fat, with a flat nose, bad character, ill-natured and having pervert behaviour.
(Translations by P.L. Sharma)

Thus, *bhūmi* has been treated in the **Nāṭya-Śāstra** at three levels – (i) at the physical level it means the earth or ground of the stage and auditorium; (ii) the physico-psychological level of the perception of space by the audience and (iii) the psycho-aesthetic level of dramatic presentation involving assignment of roles to actors. In all the three levels, the thread of unity is that *bhūmi* or *bhūmikā* is the ground on which a physical construction, perceptional creation or aesthetic presentation is based.

Although *bhūmi* is used here, *bhūmikā* is much more usual in this sense, as it is in the meaning of a floor of a building mentioned above.

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From the meaning of base or foundation, *bhūmi/bhūmikā* also comes to be used in the meaning of ground work in any art, such as poetics. Abhinavagupta comments in his **Dhvanyāloka-Locana:**

> भूमिरिव भूमिका । यथा अपूर्वनिर्माणे चिकीर्षिते पूर्वं भूमिरेव विरच्यते तथा ध्वनिस्वरूपे प्रतीयमानाख्ये निरूपयितव्ये निर्विवादसिद्धवाच्याभिधानं भूमिः, तत्पृष्ठोऽत्थितप्रतीयमानांशोल्लिङ्गनात् ।
>
> DhvĀlLoc p. 18
>
> The word *bhūmikā* means foundation, i.e. groundwork. Just as the groundwork is first constructed when a new building is desired to be built, so also when the nature of suggested meaning is to be set forth, the ground work consists of the primary meaning agreed upon by all. The suggested meaning is constructed on top of that.

Conclusion

From the earliest period *pṛthivī/bhūmi* meant the earth, with its cultivated lands, human habitat and forests, rivers, oceans and the rest. It meant territory, country, domain. It represented the environment where men lead their lives, produce their food and conduct their other activities including religious ones. This sense of the nurturing earth led people to conceive and worship her as Mother Earth. Words meaning 'earth' also signify one of the cosmic elements (*paramāṇu/dhātu*) that went into the structure of the creation of the world.

The same words also denote the ground on which men build their homestead, palaces and temples. The earth is pure and has its foundation in Truth and Cosmic Order. Therefore, it forms the solid base for all structures. This concept is reflected in the technical sense these words have in the texts on architecture and sculpture where they denote the site, the ground-plan, the foundation, the floor, level and storey.

Bhūmi further signifies stages or planes of spiritual development, in Buddhism and other Yoga systems. In any case it is the firm ground on which physical or spiritual realities stand, and it plays an important role in cosmology as well as soteriology.

Reverence for the earth as it is expressed in the ancient Indian texts, ritual and artistic traditions, could serve as a model for the concerns of present-day ecology.

Sanjukta Gupta Gombrich
Bhūmi/Bhūmikā in Nāṭya-Śāstra
by P.L. Sharma

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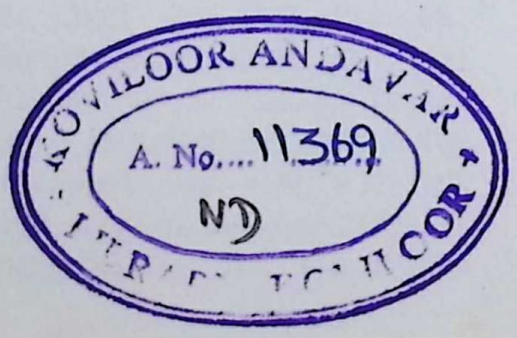

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